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Assam's Language Question

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Assam's Language Question

A Symposium

Edited by
DR MAHESWAR NEOG



Asam Sahitya Sabha
Chandrakanta Handiqui Bhavan
Jorhat, Assam
1961

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PREFATORY

"He, whose son is not in the council, hath a secret stain."—
So goes an adage in Assamese. Assam has ever been suffering in the eyes of others just because of her case being often not fully known outside. This was the thing when Assamese was thrown out of Assam's schools and law courts in 1836 and Bengali took its place. This was particularly the case when last year very wise parliamentarians and others raged and stormed, and were ready to play the Duhsasana in dragging Assam to the criminal's dock. And all this was mainly because a sort of vedantic Maya in the form of a strong Press and political leadership covered (as it still covers) the Truth of Assam with a screen of half-truths and vilifying propaganda. People's imagination was filled with a lurid picture of Assam 'red in tooth and claw', of a vast expanse all littered with the killed, the mangled and maimed ! although the crimes against humanity so skilfully described by Yellow Journalism remained nearly in all cases only in the creative imagination of the press reporters. On the other hand, there was no possibility of the press-notes of the State Government on such stories reaching the critics and far less the wide public of India. Language figures of census were worked out to suit one's own fancy—which only reminded the Assamese of the mischievous tampering of such figures in the censuses of 1881, 1891 and 1901. Many an outside speaker and writer on Assam's affairs acted from a very wrong notion that the Bengali-speakers in Assam far outnumbered the Assamese and were not a minority at all. Some were even all kindness to point to the superiority of the Bengali language and literature to the Assamese ; and others again cited Switzerland and Yugoslavia and all far-off climes in advocating Bengali being made an official language in Assam. The Malay language was declared the national language in Malaya after the Mer Deka or Independence Day, although it had not produced one eminent poet or prose-writer till date ; and this decision was very warmly welcomed by the Chinese, who formed forty per cent of the population, who had a well-developed language and literature of their own, and whose language had been the medium of instruction in Malaya. Such instances we conveniently forget, and act under Maya. The Government and the people of Assam thus still remain in the accused box. How could then one believe that the language disturbances of Assam are vagaries fomented in some other distillery ?

It is from considerations such as these that we are bringing out this very thin publication. We have tried to be as objective as possible in our approach, and have worked from the belief that a pound of fact is worth a ton of argument and propaganda. We are certainly free to be criticised, but would not be happy to be confronted with rigmarole and balderdash.

We are very thankful to Dr V. Venkata Rao for allowing us to include here his paper already published elsewhere.

Vaijayanti, Saraniya
Gauhati, Assam
The 1st August 1961

MAHESWAR NEOG,
General Secretary,
Assam Sahitya Sabha

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Assamese, The Official Language Of Assam

By

TRAILOKYANATH GOSWAMI

Assam, a frontier state situated in the north-east corner of India, covers an area of nearly 47,000 square miles, of which about 24,000 belong to the plains and 23,000 to the four Autonomous Hill Districts. The magnificent hills clothed in deep green, the fertile plains with luxuriant crops in different seasons, the torrents of water flowing down the hills both in summer and in winter and the big tea-gardens spreading over extensive tracts of land can attract the tourists from outside and charm them with a variety and richness in the beauty of nature hardly met with in many other parts of India. The Brahmaputra Valley extending east to west from the district of Lakhimpur to Goalpara and the district of Cachar extending towards the South constitute the two plain regions in the State and nearly one hundred and five lakhs of people inhabit these regions, while the four Autonomous Districts, namely, the Garo Hills, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the Mizo District and the United Mikir and North Cachar Hills contain a population of about thirteen lakhs only. The hills which are beautified by rocks and forests, creepers and flowers are mainly inhabited by different tribes with different beliefs, social customs and different dialects.

Prior to the coming of the British rulers, nearly a hundred and thirty-five years ago, the people inhabiting the plain region had good trade and other relations with the different adjacent hill tribes of the State, and the fever of isolationism, that infected the minds of a section of the hill people later, is to a great extent, the result of the British administration that sedulously tried to keep them apart from their brethren in the plains. The Christian missionaries who penetrated the innermost parts of the hills, exercised a potent influence over the minds of the educated section, which became more and more attracted to a way of life and thought that is decidedly not their own. The Brahmaputra Valley consists of the six plain districts, Lakhimpur, Sibsagar,

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Nowgong, Darrang, Kamrup and Goalpara, and is the homeland of nearly 76 per cent of the total population of the entire State. The language spoken by an overwhelmingly large section of the people of this Valley is Assamese, which is also the official language of the State now. The district of Cachar, with an area of 2,688 square miles, contains 13 per cent of the total population consisting of the Assamese, the original inhabitants, the Manipuris, the Bengali settlers and the refugees who migrated to Assam after the partition of India. In Cachar a section of the original inhabitants speaks Assamese; the refugees and the Bengali settlers speak Bengali; the Manipuris have their own dialect and a section of the indigenous people of the district speak a dialect which has some affinity both to Assamese and to Bengali. Like Cachar, the Brahmaputra Valley also contains people, who were non-Assamese in their origin, but most of them, being permanent settlers here, have indentified themselves with the children of the soil and have tried to contribute, quite in their own way, to the growth and development of the State.

Assamese, which is spoken by more than 60 per cent of the total population and which is understood by a large section of the hill and other non-Assamese people, is one of the earliest branches of the Magadhi Apabhramsa, a sub-branch of the Indo-Aryan languages. This language, however, has undergone manifold changes in course of time and its vocabulary has been enriched by the impact of the languages of the Austric family and Tibeto-Burman and Shan-Tai groups. The history of the evolution of the Assamese language, therefore, is the history of the process of assimilation of words and idioms from diverse sources besides the parent stock from which it sprang.

Evidence on the antiquity of the Assamese language can be cited from the record left by Hiuen-tsang, a Chinese pilgrim, who visited the kingdom of Kamarupa during the reign of Bhaskar-varman in the 7th century A.D. The Chinese pilgrim found the speech of the people of Kamarupa slightly different from that of the people in other parts of India. Dr. Suniti Kumar Chatterji concludes: "In the middle of the 7th century, as the testimony of Hiuen-Tsang seems to suggest, there was one language spoken in Bihar and Bengal, only in Assam there was distinction."

This language which was slightly different from the languages spoken in mid-India gradually developed, as other living languages do, and at one time in the past, it was the principal spoken language of the people inhabiting the extensive area from the Karatoya to Sadiya. It was this Assamese language through which a linguistic unity was aimed at by the then rulers of Assam and its surrounding parts. The Bodo-Kachari and the Ahom-Chutiya rulers of Assam realised early the importance of a

common language for administrative facilities and cultural enrichment of the people. They, therefore, adopted Assamese as their court language and gave impetus to the writers for development of its literature. The different Naga clans, who speak different dialects of their own, communicate among themselves through the medium of Assamese. In this connection J.H. Hutton holds: "Indeed the Assamese language as used in the Naga Hills is peculiarly well adopted for the reproduction of Naga idioms and as a vehicle of interpretation it makes a far better lingua franca for the hill than Hindusthani or English would." Smith in his book *The Ao Naga Tribes of Assam* writes: "In the neighbouring tribe, the Lhota Nagas, the Assamese language is used more freely."

From the above it is clear that Assamese, which developed independently on its own line was used in the past as the vehicle of communication among the different hill tribes and other non-Assamese people of the province. In spite of the linguistic and other diversities in Assam, Assamese, the major language of the province, served as a cementing force in uniting the different people and bringing them into closer contacts. Today also it is the only language in Assam which is understood by nearly 80 per cent of the people, including the Bengalis of Cachar. It is sheer sentimentality that induced a section of the Bengali speaking people of Cachar to agitate over the Assam Official Language Act, which provides adequate safeguards to the minorities in the State. The myth that 90 per cent of the people of Cachar oppose the Assam Official Language Act, has been completely falsified by the counter-agitation launched recently by the indigenous people of the district, demanding retention of the Mahakuma Parishad clause in the Language Act. This group has also demanded of the Chief Minister to decide the issue by a plebiscite in Cachar if he deems it necessary.

Assamese, which is a living and growing modern language, possesses a glorious past and a rich literature. Nearly six hundred years ago Madhava Kandali translated the entire Ramayana of Valmiki from its original Sanskrit in verse forms under the inspiration of the Barahi king, Mahamanikya. Durgavar presented the story of the Ramayana through a number of lucid and moving songs. The great saint poet Sankaradeva and his disciple Madhavadeva made translations from Sanskrit, wrote devotional poems, composed dramas and songs and enriched Assamese literature with their contributions as early as the sixteenth century A.D. Rama Saraswati, Kamsari and others made free translations of the voluminous Mahabharata. Bhattadeva, one of the earliest prose writers in the modern Indian languages, wrote the *Katha-gita* and the *Katha-bhagavata* and both of these two books contain fine specimens of Assamese prose-style of

the latter part of the sixteenth century A.D. Noticing Bhattadeva's skill in the use of short sentences for clarification of thought-heavy subject matter, Acharya P.C. Ray said : "Assamese prose literature developed to a stage in the far distant sixteenth century which no other literature of the world reached except the writings of Hooker and Latimer in England. The *Katha-gita* shows clearly that Assamese literature developed to a standard in the sixteenth century which the Bengali literature has reached only in the time of Iswarchandra and Bankimchandra."

In the modern period quite a good number of writers have left marks of originality in different art-forms such as poetry, drama, novel, short-story and criticism. Lakshminath Bezbaroa brought modern Assamese prose-style to a stage of perfection through his voluminous contributions. It is he who introduced and popularised the modern Assamese short-story through his books, *Sadhu Kathar Kuki*, *Surabhi* and *Jonbiri*. Padmanath Gohain Barua and Rajanikanta Bardalai contributed towards the growth and development of prose fiction, particularly novels. Jyotiprasad Agarwala brought charm and freshness to the art of the Drama. Raghunath Chowdhary, Jatindranath Dowerah, Nalinibala Devi, Chandrakumar Agarwala, Ambikagiri Roy Chowdhury, Devakanta Barua and others wrote poetry and brought romantic brilliance to the themes they handled. Dr. Banikanta Kakati brought both dignity and sobriety to the art of criticism with his balanced and rhythmic prose compositions.

The younger writers of today are experimenting with new techniques and are leaning more and more towards intellectual rather than emotional appeal. Modern poetry, in spite of its obscurity, is gaining popularity rapidly, and though the old metrical compositions run parallelly side by side, it appears that the younger generation is attracted more by the new trend, which is alluring because of its newness. Social and domestic dramas are becoming more popular. Short-stories and one-act plays are highly developed, and novels presenting the social, emotional and economic problems have made their appearance and are gaining popularity. In the field of criticism, there are a few new entrants who are fond of judging literary works on the criterion of the depth and intensity of the personal impression which a literary work can leave in their receptive minds. In short, modern Assamese literature is growing, developing and receiving proper nourishment.

Assam had an awakening after the independence of India. Her educated youths have become more and more conscious of the various social political and economic problems. The destiny of these youths is linked up with the development of the State which is rather slow. Yet the prospect of a better and happier future is a source of inspiration and it serves as the beacon light in the distant cloudy horizon.

The Language Conflict

BY

V. VENKATA RAO

The language conflict began sometime in the second millennium B.C., perhaps between 1500—1200 B.C. It was at first a conflict between two main groups—the Indo-European and the Dravidian. In the beginning the Dravidian languages were in South East Asia. The Indo-European languages came later on. Since 1000 B.C. the Indo-European languages have been slowly but steadily pushing back the frontiers of the Dravidian languages. Sanskrit is the parent language of the Indo-European family which comprises a number of languages like Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and Sinhalese. The Dravidian languages are Tamil, Telugu, Canarese and Malayalam. The constant advance of the Indo-European group into the territory once held by the Dravidian group is galling to the speakers of the latter. They feel that they are the victims of Aryan linguistic and cultural imperialism. When the Indian Constitution adopted Hindi as the official language of the Union, the Dravidians felt that this was a manifestation of the Indo-European cultural aggression which they had been experiencing for some three centuries. When the Government of India made attempts for the extensive use of Hindi in the administrative and educational spheres, the resentment of the Dravidians, particularly of the Tamilians, flared up. At present a bitter conflict is going on between Sinhalese and Tamil in Ceylon. The Sinhalese shouted 'Sinhalese only'. The Tamilian's answer to this slogan was "the right of secession". The Tamilians are afraid that their political and economic interests would be jeopardised by the development of Hindi—though the present writer is not convinced of their argument. They also feel that their inherited culture symbolised by their language was being slighted. At the same time we may note that the situation in South India in regard to language problem is paradoxical. While the battle between Hindi and Tamil is going on, Hindi is rapidly spreading. The number of candidates that pass the various examinations conducted by the Hindi Prachar Sabha is enormous.

Apart from the conflict between linguistic groups, there are conflicts between the members of the same group. The principle

behind this conflict is that people speaking the same language should as far as possible live in the same State. In the nineteenth century the slogan was "One language, one State." This was used to encourage secession and for the creation of new States. To-day the tendency is to reverse this slogan into "One State, one language." The implication of this slogan is that one language should be preferred to all others for official use in the State. The result is that there is conflict between the members of the same language group. For instance, there were conflicts between Tamil and Telugu, between Canarese and Malayalam, and between Marathi and Gujarati. The language conflict was so very acute in 1955 that it threatened the integrity of the State. So the matter was referred to the States Reorganization Commission. On the recommendation of the Commission, States were reorganized and all the fourteen major national languages, except Urdu and Punjabi, got their homelands and the language problem was solved to some extent. At present the language conflict is confined to Punjabi and Hindi, and Bengali and Assamese.

The conflict between Bengali and Assamese is a hundred years' war. It began sometime in 1850. Prior to 1826, there was no perceptible Bengali population in Assam. The coming of the Ahoms early in the thirteenth century marks an important epoch. Before their arrival, there were several ruling powers like the Bhuyas, the Kacharis and the Chutiyas. Of them, the Bhuyas were the most powerful. They had their own language—Assamese (perhaps not known by such a name then). The Ahoms brought with them their own language, but Assamese was already well developed. Wise rulers as they were, the Ahoms did not like to generate opposition among the local people by the imposition of their language. So they adopted Assamese as the State language.

After the annexation of Assam by the British Assamese continued to be the State language. "It was used," says Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan in a booklet published in 1855, "with great facility and convenience and with universal satisfaction for about fifteen years in almost every department of public office." But in 1835 suddenly Assamese was replaced by Bengali. The reasons for the overthrow of Assamese by Bengali may be as follows.

After the annexation of Assam by the British the question of administering the province arose. Unfortunately, local talents for this particular purpose were not available in sufficiency. According to several state papers, the Assamese were not disposed to make a serious effort to educate their children and thereby enable them to occupy seats of power. Even the richer folk

were content with what they had. So for administering the province Bengalis had to be imported. Along with the Bengalis the Bengali language was imported. The Bengali officers and servants carried on the administration through Bengali although the State language was Assamese. Thus came into being the use of Bengali in the courts and schools of Assam. When the Assamese showed anxiety to qualify themselves for service in the State they were compelled to learn Bengali. In course of time a belief came into being that Assamese and Bengali were one and the same language though there was no foundation for such a belief. Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan in his booklet already referred to conclusively proved that the two languages were distinct from one another. He gives a list of 114 words and shows that as many as ninety have no connection whatever with Bengali. It is true that the script is the same for both the languages. But that is true also of several European languages. However, the belief persisted. Added to this the rulers of the day were ignorant of the difference between the two languages. Hopkinson, who was the Agent to the Governor-General and Commissioner of Assam for a long time, was guided by the belief implanted in him by the Bengali officers that there was no difference between the two languages and that both of them were two branches of the same stem, and that of the two Bengali was superior. As a matter of fact, some of the Bengali officers considered Assamese as an uncouth dialect of Bengali. Their view prevailed because they dominated the public services. Thus the Bengalis had done the greatest injustice to what Dr. S. K. Chatterji calls "the actual language of the people," and it is the "linguistic patriotism of the Assamese people" (to quote again from Chatterji) which protested against that injustice and succeeded in having it removed.

There were protests against the introduction of Bengali as the State language. In 1855, a distinguished scholar and officer of the Government, Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, published a small booklet disproving the thesis that Bengali and Assamese were one and the same language. He wrote the same thing in a memorandum addressed to Sir Moffatt Mills, then investigating Assam's administration. The Assamese began to agitate for the restoration of Assamese to its former position. The American Baptists working in Assam supported their cause. Hopkinson, who was the Commissioner of Assam, discountenanced the movement. But his subordinate officers, who had a better understanding of the two languages, convinced him of the validity of the contention that Assamese and Bengali were two distinct languages. In 1872, the Lt. Governor of Bengal authorised the use of Assamese in the courts of law. This decision was hailed as a decisive victory for Assamese. To commemorate the event

a newspaper in pure Assamese was published by a priest. It contained a letter from a correspondent and an article congratulating the Assamese on the restoration of Assamese to its former position. The Assamese won another decisive victory in 1873. On April 19, 1873, the Lt. Governor of Bengal issued a resolution directing the use of Assamese in all primary and middle schools and the lower classes of high schools. In the high school classes Assamese might be used provided there were Assamese text-books.

Certain practical difficulties were encountered in the execution of the resolution. There were no suitable text-books in Assamese; teachers competent to teach subjects in Assamese were not available. So in 1874, the Inspector of Schools, Assam Circle, represented to the Chief Commissioner that in view of the difficulties mentioned above, permission might be granted for the use of Bengali not only in the high school but also in the middle school classes. The Chief Commissioner, Mr. Keatinge, issued an order modifying the resolution of the Lt. Governor of Bengal and permitted the use of Bengali in the middle school classes.

Keatinge's order roused the fears of the Assamese. They thought that attempts were being made by the Bengalis of Assam to supplant Assamese by Bengali. So several residents of Sib-sagar petitioned to the Chief Commissioner protesting the re-introduction of Bengali as State language. Keatinge hastened to assure the petitioners that Assamese would not be supplanted by Bengali and Bengali would be used temporarily in the middle classes until suitable text books were available.

The century-old conflict between Assamese and Bengali is still going and now complicated by the influx of Bengali refugees from East Pakistan. Language is merely a facade of this conflict. There are deeper psychological factors at the bottom. The Assamese feel that the Bengalis are clannish, parochial and imperialistic, trying to make Assam a colony of West Bengal. The frequent interference of the Chief Minister of West Bengal in the internal affairs of Assam has strengthened this feeling. Some of my Bengal friends have created an impression in our minds that they suffer from a disease—*ahamkara* (pride), and this is sometimes betrayed by some of their utterances like 'Sonar Bangla', 'What West Bengal does today India thinks tomorrow', 'A third class of Calcutta University is equal to a first class of other universities', and so on. This feeling exists not only here but also in Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh. Above all, there is also the feeling that the Bengalis of Assam do not identify themselves with the aspirations of the local people. They always look to Calcutta as their fatherland. The Assamese point out that after all the Bengalis are not the only minority community in Assam. There are the Marwaris in substantial

numbers who have almost monopolised the entire business. They are able to get along amicably with the local people. It is not for the present writer to sit in judgement over these matters. All that he points out is that the consequences of this conflict are serious.

In the first place, it has brought about tension and there can be no progress in science, in art or in learning in such an atmosphere. Secondly, at a time when we want more schools for the rapid spread of literacy, more hospitals to mitigate the sufferings of the sick and of the infirm, and better communications to facilitate the economic development of the State, we are spending a substantial portion of our revenues on the maintenance of law and order. Thirdly, Cachar is a sensitive area on the north-eastern border. It is the area into which many East Pakistanis have infiltrated in large numbers. If agitation continues in this area the attention of the police will have to be diverted to the maintenance of law and order, and the Pakistanis may find that the most suitable time for peaceful penetration into Assam.

What is urgently necessary in Assam to-day is understanding and comprehension. The Buddha, looking eternally young, clad in ascetic robes, seated on a lotus of purity, with his two fingers upraised admonished all humanity to develop comprehension and charity, wisdom and love, *prema* and *karuna*. Asoka, his great disciple, when he found his empire inhabited by men of all races and religions said, '*samavaya eva sadhuh*'—concord is the supreme good. Assam is a symphony where there are, as in an orchestra, different instruments, each with its particular sonority, tenor and timbre, all combining to interpret a particular score. It is this kind of combination that is most essential and imperative in Assam at present.

Inside Assam 1960

By

RAGHUNATH CHOWDHARY

Assam has welcomed people from all parts of India including Nepal. Assamese hospitality is proverbial. The big industries like tea, oil, coal, etc., have employed more than a million of people from outside Assam. Trade and commerce in Assam are entirely in the hands of the non-Assamese. But the Assamese people have never raised any quarrel with any of these people; rather their relation with the indigenous people is more exemplary than in any other State in India. Even a great number of Muslim immigrants coming from Bengal have been residing in Assam for a pretty long time, side by side with the Assamese people in peace. Almost all the Muslim immigrants from Bengal have taken Assam as their home and adopted the local ways of life and thinking. They have started their schools and have taken up Assamese as their medium of learning. This has, however, caused a considerable heart-burning amongst the Bengali Hindus who are always labouring hard to inflate the number of Bengali-speaking people in Assam, and, therefore, they have tried hard to alienate them from the Assamese people and by constant persuasion and propaganda against Assamese language and its culture have succeeded in changing the medium of teaching from Assamese to Bengali in a considerable number of schools established in the immigrant areas. The Assamese people have never quarrelled on this issue, for the Assamese people never want to impose anything on the immigrants unless they themselves adopt something out of their own accord.

History itself is replete with instances of this kind since the advent of the British regime. In 1836 the Bengalis with the help of the British introduced Bengali in Assam as the medium of instruction and official language. However, owing to the Herculean efforts of such great personalities as Anandaram Dhekiyal Phukan, Hemchandra Barua, and others, the clever stratagem of the Bengalis was foiled, and the Assamese language was re-introduced. The present Constitution of India has accorded due recognition to the Assamese language as one of the 14 major languages of India.

Subsequent to India's attaining independence almost all language problems confronting the States of the Indian Union have satisfactorily been solved. But it is a pity that when Assam considered measures for adopting Assamese as its official language, the Bengalis were very prompt in creating all sorts of troubles and impediments. It has been a regular feature of the Bengali press to attack Assam's language and culture and making malicious propaganda against it. What is more funny is that whenever the people of Assam have resented their nefarious move it is readily branded as a movement to drive out the Bengalis. The popular term given by them is 'Bangal-kheda Andolan'.

A section of Bengalis were and are still working amongst the Hill tribes to create distrust and to incite the simple-minded hill people against the Assamese and their language. In the last year's troubles in Shillong the Khasis were excited to attack the Assamese people living in the capital of Assam.

The resolution of the A.P.C.C. concerning the official language of Assam adopted in a meeting held on the 21st April 1960, emphatically declared that there was no question of imposing Assamese language on the Bengali and the hill brethren. On the other hand, the resolution incorporated adequate safeguards for upholding their interest. Far from hailing this liberal proposal, the resolution was opposed tooth and nail by the Bengalis, particularly by those of the Cachar district for reasons best known to all. It was clearly indicated in the resolution that the introduction of Assamese as official language will be kept in abeyance in the district of Cachar and other hill districts till these districts be prepared to accept Assamese. A section of the Bengalis openly declared their attitude of aggression against the Assamese, and in this anti-Assamese campaign the Bengali section of the Calcutta press tried most to whip up communal sentiments among the people which soon brought untold miseries in its train.

On the 21st May 1960 the activities of the Bengalis (as also a section of a tribe in Shillong at the instigation of Bengalis) enacted a gruesome scene in Shillong. The Bengalis brought out a procession uttering all kinds of anti-Assamese slogans, garbed in the most profane language. The action perpetrated by the Bengalis of Shillong on that day beggars description. Those responsible for maintaining peace and public order did nothing tangible to quell the disturbances but remained indifferent and inactive and thereby allowed the situation to take its own course. This affair engendered indignation throughout Assam. In Jorhat the students in demanding the introduction of Assamese as the official language brought out a procession and set out on foot to Mariani. While the processionist students were about to return to Jorhat the Bengali people of Mariani armed

with deadly weapons suddenly attacked the innocent and peaceful students and inflicted injuries upon quite a good number of them. Like the proverbial saying of a bull getting startled and head-strong at noticing a piece of bloodstained fabric and attacking every one in its rage, the Bengalis in meting out inhuman atrocities on the innocent students only unfolded their camouflaged intrigues of originating a chaotic situation in an otherwise peaceful and peace-loving State.

In quick succession to this gruesome incident came another of like description. At the Lumding Railway Junction one of the Bengali concentrated area, some people of the community committed acts of savage cruelty against a handful of Assamese residents of the place. Moreover, these rowdies attacked the local cinema house, which at the time was screening an Assamese film and, in demanding the stopping of Assamese films in that area, assaulted and intimidated the cinema-goers. As a consequence of these acts of violence some of the Assamese people there were forced to leave their own hearth and home and become refugees in their own homeland. Assamese men and women escaped the hooligans and managed to reach Gauhati via Jorhat.

The Assamese people expressed their strong and unequivocal protest and indignation against these well-planned and deliberate anti-Assamese activities; stray and sporadic demonstrations against the Bengalis also began to take place. Instead of decrying the manifest barbarism of the Bengalis perpetrated against the Assamese, the Calcutta press, strangely enough, became up and doing to publicise baseless and highly exaggerated rumours with the ulterior motive of fanning the flame of strife and bringing disgrace on the Assamese and lower their position in the estimation of other States of India. The Bar Association of Silchar also requested Central Government through a resolution to take over the administrative responsibility of the State for the alleged breach of peace and order in the State. At the same time the Bengalis continued their efforts to sow seeds of discord among the Bihari, Nepali, Punjabi and other linguistic groups, who were hitherto living in blissful peace and amity with the indigenous people of Assam. In other words, the Bengalis tried to win over others to support their dark intentions and create a united front against the Assamese. A statement made by the leader of the Bihari Workers Union clearly exposed the aforesaid artifices of the Bengalis.

By creating this inflammatory situation the Bengalis held an economic convention at Silchar in an effort to give a fresh impetus to their 'Purvachal movement'. Needless to say, the so-called

economic convention at Silchar was but to hoodwink the public. Simultaneously, a Bengali Language Convention was called at Silchar and in the meeting a Bengali leader, Sri Chapalakanta Bhattacharya, gave vent to his preposterous demand of declaring Assam a bi-lingual State; and, harping on the same tune, the Calcutta press tried to incite hatred and anti-Assamese feelings among the other sections of the people. The above incidents only added provocation to the already deteriorating and tense situation, and pushed matters from bad to worse. The Assamese people could hardly afford to put up with such a grim state of things. At the time of these nefarious occurrences at Silchar the police administration of Gauhati was wielded by a few officers who seemed to be labouring under some grudges and hostility against the student community. On various pretexts these officers persuaded the civil authorities to clamp down curfew order on the city, and this order had resulted in ushering in a panicky situation and paralysing the normal life of the town. The public offered their strongest protest against this uncalled for restriction on civil liberty, and the authorities concerned, due to their inability to justify the order, withdrew it on the 1st July 1960.

In Gauhati on the 4th of July a fire broke out in the vicinity of a Cotton College Hostel, upon which the police, for obvious reasons, availed themselves of the opportunity to put the blame squarely upon the college students and resorted to wanton and illegal firing within the hostel grounds as a result of which the valuable life of a student was lost instantaneously and six other students were seriously injured. Immediately after the above indiscriminate police firing, curfew was re-imposed in the town at day-time. The news of these incidents of bloodshed and atrocities of the police, were determined to bring about a reign of terror in the town, spread like wild fire and precipitated certain untoward happenings in different parts of the State. The adherents of the ideology of Chapala Babu and their propaganda machinery at Calcutta must have chuckled now that matters came to such a head.

In the meantime a great turmoil and uproar was engendered by the miscreants throughout the districts. These miscreants had nothing to do with the language problem. As is the case with all miscreants in the world, they took advantage of the abnormal situation and indulged in their nefarious activities. The Bengali residents of these localities, who are mostly refugees from East Pakistan and whose hearts had already been weakened by the shock they received in Pakistan, had run away at the slightest apprehension. There were cases where a baseless rumour was sufficient to scare away such refugees. Consequently some of them fled away to Siliguri and other places. In those places the evacuees, who were adept in making a mountain of a mole-

hill, began pouring in baseless rumours and presented a lurid picture of every conceivable incident in Assam. In many instances these crafty people, in the hope of more compensation and other benefits, were themselves responsible for setting fire to their own dwellings after having secretly transferred their house-hold belongings to safer places of their relatives and friends. They also expected thereby to fabricate a situation of artificial panic among the people. They anticipated quite correctly that the Government and the people of West Bengal would support them in the emergency created by their own acts of folly. In entering Assam this advance contingent of Bengali troops had already been nourishing their hope of establishing a Greater Bengal on the soil of Assam. These Bengalis got active sympathy and co-operation from people of their original land in interfering in the internal affairs of this State and that goes to the jeopardizing of the peaceful existence of the people of Assam. This extra-territorial guardianship of the Government and people of West Bengal has naturally caused widespread resentment in Assam.

These Bengalis have never supported any cause for development of Assam; rather they have tried always to have pursued a policy of aloofness. When Assam tried to have its own University, the Bengalis in Assam tried to create various obstructions in and outside the Legislative Assembly. They also opposed the establishment of the Assam High Court, and an independent Railway Zone for Assam. When the question of establishing a second Medical College in Assam came up, they created obstacles by demanding the same to be established at Silchar—one Medical College for one district, as if Cachar was to be considered as equal to all the rest of Assam.

During the non-cooperation movement launched by Mahatma Gandhi in 1921, the Bengalis in general in the Assam Valley played but a passive role; rather they enjoyed and collected fortune while the Assamese left their avocations and suffered behind the prison bar. It was really unfortunate that while the Bengalis of Bengal played a glorious part in the freedom movement, the Bengali fortune-seekers in Assam played a retrograde role. Most of them lived an exclusive life of economic and political gain.

Shri Sankardas Banerji and two other big leaders of Calcutta, who came to Assam as so-called messengers of peace, did not hesitate to designate the present disturbances as "Bangal-kheda Andolan". There can be no gainsaying the fact that the present

disturbances in Assam is rather a single phase of the comprehensive scheme of the Bengali people for a planned drive for translating their idea of Greater Bengal into reality. The Chief Minister of West Bengal, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, and other responsible leaders of Bengal also, in regretting the recent happenings in Assam, have been attempting their best to stigmatise the Assamese people for what they call narrow provincialism. From all this it appears that the Bengalis as a race are now suffering from an incorrigible mental condition which has created confusion in all their thoughts and activities. The action of Dr. Roy in meting out cruelty to the indigenous Assamese of Cooch Behar and Jalpaiguri subsequent to their partial annexation with Bengal needs no mention. Besides, when the S.R.C. visited Assam the unfruitful attempt of the Bengalis to annex a portion of the Dhubri sub-division of the Goalpara district to West Bengal might very well be recalled here. Dr. Roy would certainly have displayed his magnanimity if he himself could mend his ways by branding his own actions as narrow provincialism. At Siliguri in his State the act of some Bengali assailants has been responsible for causing the sorrowful death of a budding Assamese litterateur in Railway service, who had nothing to do with the Bengali-Assamese quarrel and was only on his way back from Calcutta on official business. It was reported that he was dragged out of a Railway car and was brutally hacked to death. The responsible authorities of the Government of Bengal not only failed to give protection to his life, but, what is most disgraceful, could not even send the dead body to the parents of the deceased.

The mob made an attempt on the life of the leader of opposition in the Assam Legislative Assembly and his wife, who as a result were badly assaulted and injured. Assam-bound trains at Siliguri and nearby stations were stopped and Assamese people were dragged out of the compartments and assaulted. Even Marwari and Hindusthanis were unable to escape this rowdism. The Assamese people in Calcutta passed their life amidst great anxiety and uncertainty. Calcutta hotels were searched everyday to find out if any Assamese persons had come in. Similarly in Cachar, another hot-bed of Bengali fanaticism, the life of the Assamese people was at stake. Not only that; the Presidents of the A.I.C.C. and A.P.C.C. who went to visit Silchar met with the most ugly welcome from the Bengalis, who always boast of their high culture and civilisation. All this is really very unfortunate. For ensuring the security and integrity of Assam and West Bengal in particular and that of India in general it was expected that both the Assam Government and the West Bengal Government would come forward in right earnest to

prevent the recurrence of like incidents in the future in their respective States. The local Bengali people, who have permanently come to reside in this land, are also beseeched with folded hands to shed all their fanatic pride and take Assam not as a place of sojourn, but as their own home, and thus create a congenial atmosphere of brotherhood and good-neighbourliness where they can live a peaceful and contented life with the rest of the indigenous people of the State.

The Assam Official Language Act 1960 : Some Legal Implications

By

D. PATHAK

The Assam Official Language Act 1960 is purported to have been passed in exercise of the powers given by Article 345 of the Constitution of India. The Preamble of the Act declares these powers being exercised by the legislature of the State of Assam. Sub-section (2) of Section 1 of the Act provides that the Act extends to the whole of the State of Assam. Section 3 of the Act is the operative section by which Assamese is adopted as the official language of the State of Assam. This enactment has the effect of extending the Assamese language throughout the whole State by virtue of the provision of sub-section (2) of Section 1 of the Act and Article 345. As soon as an official language is adopted by law by a legislature of a State it shall be operative throughout the whole State, and the same cannot be shut out from a particular area of a State.

Now, Article 345 provides : "Subject to the provisions of Articles 346 and 347, the legislature of a State may by law adopt any one or more of the languages in use in the State or Hindi as the language or languages to be used for all or any of the official purposes of that State." This provision amply demonstrates that once the legislature of a State adopts an official language it can restrict the use of the official language as to particular purpose but it cannot arrogate any power under this provision to restrict the use of the official language as to any particular area.

The above interpretation is borne out if one carefully examines Article 347, which provides : "On a demand being made in that behalf, the President may, if he is satisfied that a substantial proportion of the population of a State desire the use of any language spoken by them to be recognised by that State, direct that such language shall **also** be officially recognised throughout that State or any part thereof for such purpose as he may specify." Here the word "also" is quite significant. When the President in exercise of power given under Article 347

directs the State to recognise a particular language then that language shall also be recognised along with the official language already adopted, throughout the whole State or any part thereof for such purpose as the President specifies. From a careful consideration we find that under this provision the President may restrict that language not only as to purpose but also as to area.

Therefore, if the legislature of a State makes any attempt to restrict the use of the official language in respect of a particular area, then it will not only be outside the legislative power and competence of the State legislature given under Article 345, but it will also be a case of trenching the power of the President given under Article 347.

Section 3 of the Act provides : "Without prejudice to the provisions of Articles 346 and 347 of the Constitution of India and subject as hereinafter provided, Assamese shall be used for all or any of the purposes of the State of Assam :

"Provided that the English language, so long as the use thereof is permissible under Article 343 of the Constitution of India, and thereafter Hindi in place of English, shall also be used for such official purposes of the Secretariat and the offices of the Heads of the Departments of the State Government and in such manner as may be prescribed ;

"Provided further that,—

- (a) all Ordinances promulgated under Article 213 of the Constitution of India ;
- (b) all Acts passed by the State Legislature ;
- (c) all Bills to be introduced or amendments thereto be moved in the State Legislature ; and
- (d) all Orders, Regulations, Rules and Byelaws issued by the State Government under the Constitution of India or any law made by Parliament or the Legislature of the State,

shall be published in the official Gazette in the Assamese language."

By the first part of Section 3 Assamese has been adopted as the official language of the State, and this is the operative part of the Act, which cannot be whittled down by some other provisions in the Act if such provisions are outside the ambit of power given under Article 345.

The second proviso to Section 3 authorises the publication of all matters coming under sub-clause (a) to (d) in Assamese.

But this is to be read subject to clause (3) of Article 348 which runs thus :

"Notwithstanding anything in sub-clause (b) of clause (1), where the Legislature of a State has prescribed any language other than the English language for use in Bills introduced in, or Acts passed by, the Legislature of the State or in Ordinances promulgated by the Governor of the State or in any order, rule, regulation or byelaws referred to in paragraph (iii) of that sub-clause, a translation of the same in the English language published under the authority of the Governor of the State in the Official Gazette of that State shall be deemed to be the authoritative text thereof in the English language under this Article."

The sub-clause (b) of clause (1) of Article 348 referred to above reads thus : "The authoritative texts—

- (i) of all Bills to be introduced or, amendments thereto to be moved in either House of Parliament or in the House or either House of the Legislature of a State,
- (ii) of all Acts passed by Parliament or the Legislature of a State and of all Ordinances promulgated by the President or the Governor of a State, and
- (iii) of all orders, rules, regulations and byelaws issued under this Constitution or under any law made by Parliament or the Legislature of a State, shall be in the English Language."

The effects of clause (3) of Article 348 are not clear. It makes an exception to the provision in clause (1) (b) of that Article, in favour of a State legislature. The two provisions, read together, indicate that a State legislature may prescribe the use of any language other than English for Bills and Acts passed by itself, or subordinate legislation made thereunder ; but then, it is an English translation of the Bill or Act, duly published under clause (3), which shall be deemed to be the authoritative text of the same. It follows, therefore, as it has been held in *Saghir Ahmed v. State of U.P.*, A.I.R. 1954 All. 257(278), that in case of conflict between the State language and the English translation, the latter shall prevail. In *Ashgar Ali v. State of U.P.*, A.I.R. 1959 All. 792, it has been held that in order to be an "authoritative text", the English translation must be published "under the authority of the Governor."

Now let us examine sections 4 and 5 which have become the bone of contention since the enactment of the Act.

"4. Notwithstanding anything in Section 3, only languages which are in use immediately before the commencement of this

Act shall continue to be used for administrative and other official purposes upto and including the level of the Autonomous Region or the Autonomous District, as the case may be, until the Regional Council or the District Council in respect of the Autonomous Region or the Autonomous District as the case may be, by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting decide in favour of adoption of any other language for any of the administrative or official purposes within that region or district.

"5. Notwithstanding anything in Section 3, the Bengali language shall be used for administrative and other official purposes upto and including the district level in the district of Cachar until the Mohkuma Parishads and Municipal Boards of the district in a joint meeting by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting decide in favour of adoption of the official language*for use in the district for the aforesaid purposes."

These two sections are obviously the putative children of the legislature given birth to due to its anxiety to give protection to the linguistic minorities. But this does not seem to be within the competence of the legislature exercisable under Article 345. Because this will have the effect of restricting the use of the official language, Assamese, from those areas mentioned in sections 4 and 5. The enactment of these two sections will have the effect of offending Article 345. Moreover, in these two sections, it seems, the legislature has delegated the essential legislative functions to the Regional Council or District Council (re.s.4) and to the Mahkuma Parishads and Municipal Boards (re.s.5). In fact the provisions of these two sections have got the effect of abdicating the essential legislative function of the legislature so far as those provisions are concerned. Section 4 provides the continuance of the regional language or languages spoken in those areas, and Section 5 provides for the continuance of Bengali without these languages being declared as official languages. This measure is not permissible. This could be done only by the President, who derives such powers under Article 347.

The interpretations given above regarding Sections 4 and 5 are the outcome of strict construction of the sections. Probably that is not the intention of the legislature. If the sections are liberally construed, then it may be gathered that the official language as declared by Section 3 of the Act will extend to the whole state including those areas mentioned in Sections 4 and 5. It may be liberally construed that the option given to Regional Council or District Council (re. s.4) and to the Mohkuma Parishads and Municipal Boards (re. s.5) to adopt any other

language (re. s.4) and official language (re. s.5) is of recommendatory effect, which shall have to be taken up by the legislature for proper enactment.

Article 347 of the Constitution of India has given sufficient safeguard to the linguistic minority groups for the declaration of the minorities' languages for the use of such purpose and such areas as the President specifies. But then, recourse shall have to be taken by the President under the power given by Article 347. Apart from the protection given by Article 347 to the linguistic minorities, other safeguards are given to them by Article 350A and Article 350B of the Constitution of India.

It is sufficiently evident from the above that the use of the official language of the State cannot be restricted as to any particular area. Secondly, Sections 4 and 5 of the Assam Official Language Act 1960 place unnecessary restrictions on the official language as in terms of Section 3, probably due to the Assam legislators' overkind zeal for safeguarding the linguistic minorities more than is warranted by the Constitution of India. Any move to amend the Language Act must, therefore, pay due attention to these matters more than to any other considerations and demands.

The Shastri Formula And The Roy Recipe

SATIS CHANDRA KAKATI

The Shastri formula has been before the public for some time now. The author of the formula is the Union Home Minister, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, himself. It was evolved on June 6. The object behind this formula was to find out a solution of the language tangle in Assam vis-a-vis the Assam Official Language Act 1960 and the Sangram Parishad movement in Cachar. Cachar witnessed a series of unhappy incidents in May-June this year involving loss of human lives. It was only natural that our leaders were anxious to discuss the entire situation obtaining in Cachar and solve it. It was after prolonged discussion with the Assam Government, the Assam Pradesh Congress, and a section of the Cachar people that the Union Home Minister unfolded his formula; but none of the organizations in the Brahmaputra Valley including Asam Sahitya Sabha was consulted by Shri Shastri in the process of his efforts to solve the Cachar problem.

The main points of the Shastri formula are :

1. The Assam Official Language Act 1960 may be amended to do away with the provision relating to Mahkuma Parishads.
2. Communication between the State headquarters and Cachar and Autonomous Hill Districts will continue in English until replaced by Hindi.
3. At the State level, English will be used for the present. Later English will continue to be used along with Assamese.
4. Linguistic minorities in the State will be accorded the safeguards contained in the Government of India's Memorandum dated September 19, 1956.
5. Clarifications may be used that under the provision of Article 343(3) of the Constitution all Acts, Bills, Ordinances, Regulations and Orders, etc., will continue to be published in

the Official Gazette in English, even where these are published in Assamese under the second proviso to Section 3 of the Official Language Act.

6. Some arrangements to be considered for effective implementation of development schemes at the district level (Cachar).

7. The agitation in Cachar should be withdrawn.

8. The Assam Government may consider the release of all prisoners detained in connection with the movement, except those charged with crimes involving violence and sabotage, as soon as they are satisfied that the movement will not be resumed.

The eight-point Shastri formula, as detailed above, contains two parts : one part, comprising points 1, 2, 3 and 5, relates to the Assam Official Language Act 1960; and the other part, comprising points 4, 6, 7 and 8, relates to purely administrative matters.

It is clear that in the event of Assam Government's acceptance of the first part of the formula to which the Government and the party in power are committed, the Assam Official Language Act will stand amended in regard to Clause 5 in the aforesaid Act as follows : "Notwithstanding anything in Section 3, the Bengali language shall be used for administrative and other official purposes upto and including the district level in the district of Cachar."

The original Clause in the Act reads : "Notwithstanding anything.....until the Mahkuma Parishads and the Municipal Boards in a joint meeting by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting decide in favour of adoption of the official language for use in the district for the aforesaid purposes."

Thus it will appear that the Assam Official Language Act, as it stands today, has provided for free use of Bengali in Cachar at the district level with only a future possibility for Assamese (the official language in terms of the Act) being introduced in Cachar, should the people's representatives in the Mahkuma Parishads and the Municipal Boards in Cachar at a meeting in a manner prescribed in the Mahkuma Parishad proviso decide to replace Bengali with Assamese. This clause is apparently not to the liking of a section of the Cachar people. But, considered from the point of the claim of the Sangram Parishad leadership that the Bengali speaking population in Cachar is

80 per cent, if not more, the Mahkuma Parishad proviso should have been treated by the Sangram Parishad leadership as a permanent veto against Assamese getting into Cachar as official language even at the district level.

The Sangram Parishad, be it noted, is composed of that section of the Cachar population which is drawn from refugees and the townspeople. It is this very section which spearheaded the movement for making Bengali an additional official language in Assam. The majority of the rural people in the district were not acquainted with the manouvres of the Sangram Parishad, and, therefore, did not oppose the latter's agitation until they realized the grave implications of the Sangram Parishad movement. It is unfortunate the Union Government and the Congress High Command took it for granted, at the earlier stage of the Sangram Parishad movement, that this organization was representative of Cachar's public opinion. Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri himself had no other assessment of the situation either before he announced his formula. The crux of the matter lie there.

Now, the pertinent question is : Is the proposal to delete the Mahkuma Parishad proviso in terms of the Shastri formula warranted by cold facts of logic and constitutional propriety ? The claim of the Sangram Parishad that it represents Cachar opinion has been proved hollow by subsequent events in Cachar, particularly the Santi Parishad's challenge to the Sangram Parishad to speak on behalf of the Cachar people. The Santi Parishad has the support of the Muslims (4,29,457), Manipuris (81, 127), Hindusthanis (1,16,725), others (57, 241) and Hindus—original Kacharis—(about 4 lakhs). These figures taken from the 1951 census show that the Santi Parishad represents the vast majority of the Cachar people.

The total population of Cachar is 11,15,865 of whom 6,76,640 are Hindus and 4,29,457 Muslims and the rest others.

The Government of India had apparently no knowledge earlier about the exaggeratedness of the claim of the Sangram Parishad to speak on behalf of the people in regard to the language issue. The Union Home Minister approached the issue on the basis of the Sangram Parishad movement. This eventually annoyed the Santi Parishad supporters, who are Muslims, Manipuris, Hindusthanis, and the indigenous people and led to the Hailakandi demonstrations, which were nothing but the expression of Cachar's real voice. It would indeed be a distortion of facts if the Santi Parishad movement is characterized as communal ;

for if it were communal, why has it had the support of Manipuris, Hindusthanis, indigenous Cacharis who are as good, if not better, Hindus like other Hindus of Cachar ?

No one would like to forecast the shape of things about the future trends in Cachar regarding the language issue, but considering the mass rising in favour of Assamese being the official language even at the district level there, it is probable that the Mahkuma Parishads and Municipal Boards by simple majority votes may demand introduction of Assamese there. Then, why should the majority of Cachar people and the people of Assam as a whole be deprived of a constitutional right to use the Assamese language, i.e., the official language ? (Section 3 of the Assam Official Language Act 1960 reads : "Without prejudice to the provisions of Articles 346 and 347 of the Constitution of India and subject as hereinafter provided, Assamese shall be used for all or any of the official purposes of the State of Assam.")

It is not understood why the Sangram Parishad, instead of approaching the President of India under Article 347 of the Constitution and abide by his decision in regard to their grievance on the language issue, launched a movement—militant and uncalled for—to paralyse law and order.

To the Assamese people the Assam Official Language Act 1960 has not been a fair deal, but considering all factors such as the tribal sentiment, Assam's strategic position, etc., the Assamese people accepted the Act. The Shastri formula, if implemented, will render the Assamese language to the status of a regional one in practice, and side by side, Assam will remain a bilingual State with Assamese and English now and Assamese and Hindi when English is abolished later. What is amazing, Assamese will have no access to Cachar and the Hill districts as official language. This position of the Assamese language having the restricted official status in Assam goes contrary to constitutional propriety and to what the Prime Minister says in course of a letter to Shri Atulya Ghosh in reference to the language issue in Darjeeling in West Bengal :

"But it is clear to me that in giving full recognition to the regional language, such as Nepalese, the State language does not cease to function. The State language is anyhow the language for the whole State..... In giving a minority language full protection, we should not do something which may adversely affect some other group in the area."

In regard to the second part in the Shastri formula (Points 4, 6, 7 and 8), it has already been pointed that these fall within

the administrative area. The Government of India's Memorandum of September 19, 1956, is intended to safeguard the interests of the linguistic minorities. If the Assam Government has not followed the Memorandum, it is for them to rectify the omissions and commissions, for no Government is infallible. But then, the linguistic majority believes that the Assam Government have faithfully implemented the Memorandum as any other State Governments in India and have, in fact, been liberal to the linguistic minorities in Assam. The hue and cry is raised by the Bengali speaking people of Assam, who constitute only 19.45 per cent of Assam's total population of 88,30,730 (1951 Census) but who make the preposterous claim to speak on behalf of all the non-Assamese speaking people including Hindusthanis, Marwaris, Manipuris, tribals, Nepalis, etc. This amazing behaviour of the Bengalis in Assam is born out of their "grievance complex" and "extra-territorial outlook."

The point 6 in the Shastri formula states some arrangements to be considered for effective implementation of development schemes at the district level (meaning Cachar). The Cachar leaders have now and then alleged that the Assam Government have not paid due attention to Cachar's development. Let the Assam Government reply to this charge. The relevant point in this case is that Assam as a whole is a backward State for historical reasons. Districtwise Goalpara, Darrang, Nowgong with the same population as Cachar's are undeveloped. But Cachar would like to be treated as though this district is at par with the six plains districts of Assam in the matter of securing educational and other institutions of all-Assam importance.

Indeed the points 4 and 6 in the Shastri formula were ultra vires of the language issue for which the Sangram Parishad launched its militant movement. Matters as outlined in points 4 and 5 regarding the interests of the linguistic minorities and development of Cachar have been raised at a time when the atmosphere disturbed by the Sangram Parishad movement on official language issue returned to normal.

Dr Roy's Recipe

The West Bengal Chief Minister, Dr. B.C. Roy, recently suggested that the Article 347 of the Constitution of India should be amended to declare all the States in India multilingual and that the language or languages which are spoken by at least five per cent in a State should be recognized as official language. If the Roy recipe is accepted, the first beneficiary will of course be the Bengali language, for at least in four neighbouring States of West Bengal, viz., Assam, Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh,

Bengali will attain the status of official language for the simple reason that the Bengali population in these four States is more than five per cent. Whether this will again pave the way for foisting Bengali surreptitiously as a parallel national language (Rastrabhasa) of India alongside Hindi for which there have been attempts by advocates of the Bengali language is another matter ; but one can very well visualize that the multilingual plan, as suggested by Dr. Roy, is a very impracticable proposition. The Prime Minister, Shri Nehru, giving his reaction to Dr. Roy's suggestion, said that he did not know what Dr. Roy exactly meant and observed that, while all States in India were or are multilingual in the sense that the States, to some extent, must give facilities to all the languages in India "that does not mean that they (States) function in a dozen language". New Delhi has rightly shown no sign of enthusiasm over Dr. Roy's recipe, and one would only hope that this particular suggestion of the West Bengal Chief Minister will prove a still-born baby.

It is not understood why Dr. Roy who has the reputation of being a top Congress leader chose to announce his multilingual formula at a time when the Congress was endeavouring, in pursuance of the decision at the Durgapur session of the A.I.C.C. to create a climate of national unity subordinating linguistic, communal and sectarian considerations. The minorities in India should no doubt be generously treated, but nothing should be done to encourage 'privilege consciousness' in any section of the Indian population in national interests. If Dr. Roy's suggestion is allowed to obsess us with its discussion, all the efforts which are currently under way to achieve national unity envisaged in the National Integration Scheme will become ineffective. The proposal to make the Indian States multilingual is thus fraught with grave consequences.

Dr. Roy has suggested that Article 347 of the Constitution should be so amended as to make the States multi-lingual. As has been explained above, the suggestion will more create problems than solve. Therefore, the proper course will be to amend Article 347 in the reverse way providing that all the States should be declared unilingual from the point of view of official language. The Union Home Minister, Shri Shastri, in announcing his formula of June 6 observed that every State will have its official language. (He apparently did not mention the word "languages"). One can guess that he was thinking aloud of amending the Article 347 in terms of "One State, One Language." Dr. Roy's reference to Switzerland where more than one language function as official language is far-fetched, for Indian conditions are basically different from Swiss. During the years preceding India's inde-

pendence, our country witnessed happenings which we can ill afford to forget. The partition of the country, effected under the compulsion of events, is now a fact of history which is seldom going to be undone. In connection with the S.R.C. and thereafter, the country also had to face difficult situations. In the circumstances will it be desirable at all to think in terms of Dr. Roy's suggestion to declare India's States multilingual ?

The Language Question And The Cachar Trouble

By

MAHESWAR NEOG

The demand for the declaration of the Assamese language as the official language of the State of Assam is as old as the year 1950 when the annual conference of Asam Sahitya Sabha adopted a resolution unanimously with that demand. That demand was repeated in almost every subsequent annual meeting of the Sabha. The 'July disturbances' last year pinpointed this urge of the Assamese people and raised it seriously to such a political level as would not let the Government 'sit nor stand but go.' The volume of public opinion daily increased. Many Bengalis of the Brahmaputra valley (either individually or through public meetings), the Assam Prantiya Hindusthani Sammilan, the All Assam Sikh Association, the Ex-teagarden Labour Sabha, the All Assam Chah Mazdur Sabha, the Nepali Students' Association came out with open support to the demand. The Manipuris, Muslims, Hindusthanis, tribals and the small indigenous population of Cachar declared themselves in favour of it. The crude form of reaction that came from the Bengali pockets like Lumding, Shillong and Mariani proved only to be a sharp catalyst. All this followed a much disputed statement of the large-hearted State Chief Minister on the floor of the Legislative Assembly on March 3 requiring that the demand for Assamese as the official language should also come from the linguistic minorities.

Three non-official bills on the subject threatening, the State Government tried to produce their own cards by tabling on October 10 a bill, fashioned after the now liquidated 'Pant formula'. Even before the Chief Minister made his much accommodating introductory statement the few M.L.A.'s from the Garo, Khasi and Jaintia, and Mizo Hills staged a walk out. After due deliberations and in a tense atmosphere the legislature passed the Assam Official Language Bill 1960 under the provisions of Article 345 of the Indian Constitution on October 24. The members from Cachar with the exception of the Chief Minister and another Minister absented themselves from the House. The Bill received

the assent of the Governor of Assam on December 17 and passed into the Assam Act XXXIII of 1960. Even in its final shape this piece of legislation is a compromise, whether happy or unhappy, because it does not satisfy the wishes of any section of public opinion fully. Assamese was declared to be the official language while English (until replaced by Hindi) is to be used in the Secretariat and in the offices of the Heads of Departments. No imposition of Assamese on non-Assamese speaking population is envisaged. Languages which are in use in the Autonomous Hill Districts will continue to be used up to the district level unless Regional or District Councils decide otherwise. Bengali will continue in the district of Cachar unless "the Mohkuma Parishads and Municipal Boards of the district in a joint meeting by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting decide in favour of adoption of the official language". These provisions are in line with the idea of safeguards for linguistic minorities.

The Bengali speaking M.L.A.'s of Cachar never rested content with the safeguards given to them by the Language Act. They moved from door to door, ransacked their resources in the Bengali pockets in Assam, and at last concentrated their activities at Hojai in the Nowgong district. There was a spate of unclean words, with which even a respectable lady legislator reproved the Assamese. A Nikhil Assam Bangabhasa-bhasi Samiti was formed with a rice mill enterpriser of Hojai as its groom. The Samiti formulated its demands on November 8, 1960, at Hojai and submitted a petition under Article 347 of the Constitution to the President on April 5, 1961, and its working committee decided on May 27 and 28, 1961, in a meeting in Shillong to extend the activities of the Samiti all over Assam.

The three District Congress Committees of Cachar at Silchar, Karimganj and Hailakandi were all full of whinings. A few months back the Cachar Congressmen took a leading part in organising a 'convention', which decided to take militant steps against the Assam Official Language Act and, for that purpose, to form a Cachar Zilla Gana Sangram Parishad. This, of course, followed the clue thrown out by the Calcutta press to form a semimilitant organisation. The Assam Provincial Congress raised but its feeble voice against these activities heading towards an open rebellion. Nothing daunted the Cachar Congressmen to go a step forward: they demanded a break from the APCC and the formation of their three DCC's into an independent PCC. This demand, like the one about twelve years old now to have a PCC with the addition of Tripura and Manipur, has since been turned down by the Congress High Command. But the fact would remain that this demand repeated on more occasions than

one tellingly betrays the Cachar Bengalis' attempt to find an Israel outside Assamese Assam, perhaps in a Purvachal, may be in West Bengal which lends them support in all cases and sundry. A delegation met Shri Nehru in New Delhi on May 12 urging the recognition of Bengali as Assam's second official language or, in case that could not be conceded, the separation of Cachar and other contiguous non-Assamese areas from Assam to form a separate State.

The Sangram Parishad decided to launch a civil disobedience movement towards the fulfilment of one of their two alternative demands on May 19, the day on which the Prime Minister would reach Assam. Preparations went ahead, and the Bengali-owned Calcutta dailies once again patronised the anti-Assamese movement and played the same dark role as before and after the last year's disturbances (and we have already learnt to take their words with a full grain of salt). It was announced from the Government side that they were also fully prepared to quell the threatening disturbances. But no preventive measures by way of arrests, etc., were adopted, and 144 CrPC came in Silchar only in the evening of May 18.

Prime Minister Nehru came to Gauhati on May 19 but only to be termed later as 'Murderer Nehru' by demonstrators, for as he was flying to Gauhati, Silchar saw the police firing on an unruly crowd near the railway station resulting in the death of eleven. That was sad and bad. In a muffled voice Shri Nehru deplored this and admonished that the untowardly sangram might be called off. While the Chief Minister lost no time to announce his Government's decision to hold a judicial inquiry into the firing, the Commissioner of Plains Division, B.L.Sen, made a press statement: "It has so far been ascertained that the police opened fire in the exercise of the right of private defence on the point of being overpowered by a mob." A gun was reported to have been snatched away from the hands of the police. Shri Chaliha visited Silchar and returned with injury to his spine by a fall.

The Congress President Shri Sanjeeva Reddy wired to the Cachar DCC's to abstain from the sangram. But such were the times, who was there to heed to the mandate? On May 24 a 'special convention' of the DCC's decided to sever themselves from the APCC and directed the M.L.A.'s and M.P.'s to resign their membership of legislatures. Some four of them attracted applause by announcing their resignation on the spot. Others followed suit. But only three did anything in that direction effectively along with one PSP and one CPI member. All of them were swayed by the Sangram Parishad movement. In fact the DCCs had already formed a Bhasha Andolan Samiti.

It was generally expected that the Congress High Command would take a very serious view of all this at Durgapur on May 27. But Bengali Durgapur had another tale to tell. An attempt was made on the life of Shri Reddy as he alighted on its soil in the fine morning of May 26. Even before the official deliberations began, he agreed that the Assam Official Language Bill might be amended suitably to satisfy Cachar. To bring an unprecedented surprise to the history of the Congress, the AICC meeting was adjourned for ten minutes after one minute's silence in respect of the Silchar dead. Shri Nehru deplored 'atavistic feelings' deep down among people and found the controversy between Bengali and Assamese only childish. He also made the plea for a status quo in the language question in Assam for he could find no firm line possible in the matter. However, in order to bring a reconciliation between the contending parties mediation through a member of the Congress High Command was also suggested. The Home Minister, Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri's name soon came up.

In a reception of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi Shastriji had already deprecated the methods adopted by the Sangram Parishad. "Sometimes", he said, "people behaved in such a way as to create an atmosphere of indiscipline and mismanagement in the country. No Government could tolerate such an atmosphere." But he came as a peace-maker with a conciliatory policy. Shri Chaliha extended his invitation to the Cachar Congress leaders to talks, but that invitation was declined. The Nikhil Assam Bangabhasa-bhasi Samiti had given the call for the spread of the movement and the observance of June 4 as Demands Day all over Assam. There was two days' lull in Cachar after the police firing; another lull for a week was ordered on May 30 to allow people to attend offices on the pay day. Alive to all this situation, Shastriji proceeded with cautious steps to Assam on May 30 for a five-day stay and had a "very useful talk" with Dr. B.C. Roy on the way. He held conferences with the Governor, the Ministers and top officials. A nine-member delegation from Cachar came and met Shri Shastri at Shillong on June 2. To them he reiterated the Prime Minister's status quo proposal as a via media. The APCC met at Gauhati on June 3 to discuss the situation. The Union Home Minister in the meantime flew to Silchar. He was faced by a ten thousand strong silent crowd, holding placards reading "Language or bullets", etc., and flanking all his way from Kumbhirgram to Silchar. He, however, had quiet and persuasive talks and seemed to have impressed the Cachar rebels so much so that he could claim that Cachar Congressmen had full confidence in him. He came back happy, and addressed the APCC at Gauhati in the evening of June 4. He is reported to have mildly reproved the Congress Parliamentary Party for including the Mahkuma

Parishad proviso in the Language Bill out of anger. He had his final round of talks with the Government and a hastily summoned meeting of the APCC Executive, whose agreement he easily obtained to his eight point directive, on May 5. That very day his 'formula' was made public, and the State Government made haste to decide to amend the Act according to his behests by deleting the Mahkuma Parishad provision. It was also agreed that at the State level English will continue to be used and will later be replaced by English and Assamese, and that communications between State headquarters and Cachar and the autonomous districts will continue to be in English till the latter is replaced by Hindi. All this relegated the official language, Assamese, to the position of a district language only for the Brahmaputra Valley districts.

Shastri or no Shastri, as intractable as before, the Sangram Parishad resumed its 'satyagraha' the very next morning. The Action Committee of the Parishad in a meeting at Karimganj on June 9 made short with the Shastri award, as "Shri Shastri's formula bypasses the main issue (recognition of Bengali) and as such it is wholly unacceptable." The Karimganj Subdivisional Congress Bhasa Andolan Committee also rejected the proposal at the same place and on the same date. A joint meeting of the three DCC's and Cachar Zilla Congress Bhasa Andolan Committee was held at Silchar on June 12, and the Shastri formula fared no better with them. Another joint meeting of these bodies at Karimganj on June 14 demanded the setting up of an independent agency to look after the rights and problems of minorities. Then came the Sangram Parishad's threat of a large show-down on June 19. But that was soon called off. The D.C., Cachar, came with the news that the Parishad agreed to suspend the movement indefinitely with a view to facilitating its leaders to proceed to New Delhi.

The tide is on the turn

The Sangram Parishad or the rebel Congressmen are not the only people in Cachar—a basic fact perhaps not realised by Shri Shastri or the Union Government either, and not properly attended to by the Government of Assam. Cachar's history is an integral part of the history of Assam more than of any other State, unlike that of Sylhet, which had intimate connections with Bengal and which has been shoved off to Pakistan. Even the name of Cachar (Kachar) derives itself from the name of the ruling race of Kacharis of Assam, who slowly receded into the backwoods in the face of the growing force of the Ahoms. The

Kachari kingdom of southern Assam contributed its share to the growth of the literature and culture of Assam. The Dimacha, Hirimba, Tipra and other tongues of Cachar belong to the same branch of the Tibeto-Burman as the Bodo-Kachari group of the Brahmaputra valley. There are as many as twenty villages which speak genuine Assamese—Tarapur, Jhapirband, Udarband, Garar-bhitar, Khairajan, Chalipara, Bargol, Alekhargol, Majargol, Bartal, Chutiya-basti, etc. We have heard even as small children from our grandmothers some of these names as places where refugees during the Burmese regime in Assam took shelter. The surnames of many people there are unalloyed Assamese: Hazarika, Bara, Barua, Tamuli, Saikia, Chutiya, Koch, Barkoch, Phukan, Satola, Barsatola, Medhi, Rajbangshi, etc. The Burman Kacharis of Cachar are Saraniyas, that is, Assamese Vaishnava converts. They and other Vaishnavas of Cachar are administered by *sattras* (Assamese Vaishnava colleges) in the Nowgong district. Other indigenous people of Cachar, including Muslims, speak an amalgam which is more akin to Assamese than to Bengali of the contiguous area to the west. The Kabui Nagas like their brethren in Nagaland have their brand of 'Naga-Assamese'. There are the Oraon, Santali, Hindusthani and Oriya speakers among the teagarden and ex-teagarden population beside the Meitheis, the Vishnupriyas (with the large admixture of Assamese elements in their speech), the Hmars and *Kukis—not many of them* amenable to Bengali. In 1951 out of the total population of 11,15,865 as many as 8,60,777 have been returned as Bengali speakers; that is doubtful. Moreover, with the linguistic consciousness which the last few years have brought, the linguistic table of census in Cachar 1961 may have another tale to tell.

So, this is why the two-thirds provision in deciding the official language of Cachar made in the Language Act has been found so irksome by the Sangram Parishad and the rebel Congressmen. Add to this the support lent to Assamese as the official language of the State by the Manipuris, Hindusthanis, the Muslims, the teagarden people, the tribals, etc. What mystery is there, one could ask, that no love has been lost between these people and the advocates of Bengali? The growing aversion to Bengali in Cachar may perhaps be ascribed to a number of causes, political and otherwise. The pressure on the district's economy due to the onrush of Bengali speaking Pakistan refugees (mostly Hindus) is possibly at the root of the whole trouble. The transfer of five thanas (Karimganj, Ratabari, etc.) from the Sylhet district to Cachar at the time of partition of India was looked with some suspicion by a section of the people of Cachar. A recent meeting of the indigenous people held at Asimganj objected "that after independence several lakhs of refugees migrated into the district from East Pakistan when they have pushed the local people to

the background and taking advantage of their simplicity have been trying to rob them of their due shares in everything with a view to dominate in every sphere of life in the district." The educationally and economically advanced Hindu Bengalis of these thanas and other parts of the district had a complex which was not very much to the liking of the other people. On the other hand, the advocates of Bengali inside and outside the State found it very handy to dub even the indigenous Muslims as Pakistani spies or agents. This was unwise and unfortunate. Anyway an intolerance has grown among the Bengali speaking Hindus of the district on one side and the rest on the other. It is hardly possible to suggest a remedy unless by a change of heart.

The Parishad made Karimganj with its highest concentration of East Pakistan refugees and its predominating Hindu Bengali speaking population the main seat of activity, and demonstrated tactical skill by making a Muslim, Abdur Rahaman Chowdhury, its president.

The Sangram Parishad demanded the recognition of Bengali as the second official language of Assam at all levels. There is no provision in the Constitution of India for such recognition in the case of a language spoken by 19% of the population of a State. But the overzealous people base their claim not on any Article of the Constitution but on the airy principle that "honour is to be given to the language in which Tagore spoke, read and wrote." Yes, honour where honour is due; but that cannot be done in a manner unconstitutional. For that is confused thinking which is responsible for the present impasse in Cachar. The alternative, the separation of Cachar from Assam, could perhaps have stood to more reason had it been the will of the people. This proposition was reported to have been pressed before Nehru, Reddy and Shastri at Durgapur by one of Cachar's representatives to the AICC even behind the back of one of his closest associates. And this helped to turn the tide of affairs in Cachar so far as the Sangram Parishad was concerned by very sharply antagonising the Muslim Minister from Cachar, the Muslims, the Manipuris and others in the district. The segregationists were thus caught in their own net, for who could separate Cachar against the will of the Muslims, who form 40% of the population in that district—not to speak of others who are square against the division? The Muslim support, therefore, to the Parishad soon grew into a sharp scepticism.

Counter-demonstrations to Sangram Parishad by Kachari, Manipuri Muslim and other indigenous people of Cachar first took place between May 29 and 31. At Salchapara two Sangram leaders were chased out of a meeting. The agitation was fairly widespread from the beginning. Demonstrations at Phular-tal, Sonai, Arakatipur, Alipur-Palarband, Lakhimpur, Dababil,

Dewan T.E., Lalabazar, Patharkandi, etc., were reported before June 1. On May 30 permission was sought but refused for taking out a procession of 10,000 from Srikona to Silchar to demonstrate against the sangramists. Farther meetings and demonstrations were reported from Mullaganjbazar, Lowairpur, Qajir-bazar, Kachukhaori, Gokilagaon, Asimganj, Ratabari, Sonakhira, Jaypur (the largest Kachari village in the district), Batoia, Hailakandi, Siber-gol (a predominatingly Manipuri area), Pratapgarh, Karimganj, Nilambazar, Kalachara, Kaliaganj, Udarband, Monachera, Sonabarighat and numerous other places. Santi Parishads were formed in all these areas. At places like Duarband, Algapur, there were open clashes when Sangram Parishad made abortive attempts to hold meetings. A deputation of All Assam Manipuri Association met Shri Shastri at Shillong and supported the Language Act, as it was, on behalf of the Manipuris who formed one-fifth of Cachar's population. The President of the Hmar National Union made similar statements before the Government and opposed the Sangram Parishad's views. Deputations on behalf of the Santi Parishads, which still do not have a central organisation, poured on Shri Chaliha, and spoke out vehement opposition to any form of amendment to the Language Act, claimed that 80% of the Cachar district's population were of the same view, and suggested that a referendum should be arranged to ascertain the people's view in this regard. The Government assured action and assured enquiry into the allegations that the Bengali officers in Cachar were actively working on the side of the Sangram; but they soon ended by arresting some of the leading Santi Parishad people until at last came June 19. About 10,000 Santi Parishadists came that day from different directions to the small town of Hailakandi on catching a rumour that the two Cachar Ministers were coming there. They wanted to meet the Ministers and ventilate their grievances, for they were poor people and could not go to Shillong and far less to New Delhi as no money came from any outside agencies at Calcutta or elsewhere. As some of them were returning home they were seriously provoked by the action of the reactionaries and the matter soon took serious proportions when one of them appeared on the scene with bleeding injuries. The unarmed crowd became violent in attitude, and the police fired and killed five. Seven other persons died of stabbing and like injury. That was a disastrous consummation for the Santi seekers. Where then is peace? It is no use holding conferences at Silchar, Shillong or New Delhi with the language expansionists who need a place in the sun, just because they have big platforms and large coffers. The voice of Cachar—the mute Cachar of the countryside—cannot be silenced with bullets and banner headlines in newspapers. These people have awaked and have grown

desperate. It will be a great shame to democracy if anything is imposed upon them from the top by arbitrary methods. Cachar has borne a great share of India's burden of rehabilitation of refugees, and is practically groaning under it. Language is only a symbol of their growing exasperation.

The Dark Role Of The Calcutta Press

By

HARENDRANATH BARUA

It is a historical fact that taking advantage of the non-cooperative attitude of the Assamese people towards their British conquerors during the early years of their annexation of Assam in 1826, the Bengali people, who gave support to, and held various important administrative offices under, them, persuaded them to believe that Assamese was an "uncouth dialect" of the Bengali language and to make Bengali the medium of primary and secondary education in Assam. Bengali also came to be used along with English for administrative purposes. It took the Assamese people decades to persuade the British rulers to redress this wrong and to reinstate Assamese in its rightful place. Even after this, the Bengali people have never reconciled themselves to the establishment of Assamese as a separate language; and they have been striving hard ever since to transplant Bengali into Assam and convert Assam into a Bengali-majority State. Till the 'forties of the present century, the Bengali Government officers of the State, who were the dominant native element in the Administration, did their utmost to induct Bengalis from Bengal into Assam in large numbers. They also tried hard to inflate the figures of the Bengali-speaking people in this State in the censuses, from 1881 onwards. The successive British Census Superintendents of Assam have made pointed observations in their reports on the mischief done by the Bengali officers.

In the census of 1891 Mr. (later Sir) Edward Gait was surprised to find that the number of Assamese-speakers (14, 14, 285) was only a few thousand more than their number in 1881; and he cautioned that "between Bengali and Assamese there has been waged a battle of dialects to which some interest attaches and which has not altogether been composed to rest. A few years ago it was a fashion for the Government officials (Bengali) to assert that Assamese was only a corrupt and vulgar dialect of Bengali, ... and that it ought in no way to be encouraged but to be crushed as quickly as possible, by using Bengali as the official tongue and teaching it in schools." But surprisingly enough, in the census of 1901 the figure of 14, 14, 285

was further reduced even beyond the figure of 1881 (i.e., 13, 64, 159) to 13, 49, 694. This led the Provincial Census Superintendent, Mr. B.C. Allen, to remark that the return of Bengali speakers could not be taken as accurate.

The same story was repeated in the census of 1911 also. Thereafter began the "invasion" in the words of Mr. C.S. Mullan, Superintendent of Census, 1931, by the Bengali hordes in addition. Mr. Mullan observed: "Probably the most important event in the province during the last twenty years—an event, moreover, which seems likely to alter permanently the the whole future of Assam and to destroy more surely than the Burmese invaders of 1820, is the invasion of vast hordes of land-hungry Bengali immigrants from districts of Eastern Bengal and in particular from Mymensing" (*Census of India, 1931, Vol. III, Part I, pp. 49, 52*).

The Bengal papers have always supported the cause of this Bengali invasion and domination of Assam. They have even advocated large-scale Bengali emigration to Assam with a view to conversion of this province into another Bengali-majority one, if not its integration with Bengal to constitute a "Greater Bengal". It was at their instance that as far back as 1934 the Bengalis in Assam formed an Assam Settlers' Association (as they did not identify themselves with the indigenous people of the province). They brought the Nawab of Dacca as the President of the Association's Alitangani (Nowgong, Assam) session, and publicly declared that they have a right to settle, multiply, expand and dominate here. In this venture they tried to enlist the support and association of other non-Assamese elements in Assam, who were so long living amicably with the Assamese. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* of November 22, 1935, wrote: "The Bengali residents of Assam, assembled in a big public meeting at Tezpur on 20th November last and declared that the brains of five and half lakhs of Bengali-speaking Hindus, the wealth of 20,000 Marwaris, the great labour force (6,00,000 ex-tea garden coolies), the agricultural instinct of 5 lakhs of Bhatia (Muslim) immigrants, the martial spirit of 3,000 Sikhs, 1,40,000 Nepalis and other settlers, united together would surely rule over Assam. The Assamese leaders must live here on the terms of the Bengali settlers, who have already overflowed Assam."

The rush of events during the next decade, however, baffled their plan; and both the provinces of Bengal and Assam had to be partitioned to settle the issue of Indian independence; and the larger of the two Bengali-majority districts of Assam, namely, Sylhet, with a population of over three million, went over to Pakistan in this deal. The other non-Assamese elements did not

join the Settlers' Association, and the Bengali Muslim immigrants, who were more interested in agricultural land than linguistic and territorial expansion, broke away from the Settlers' Association, and adopted Assamese-speaking in the census of 1951.

But the disappointed Bengali Hindus and the Bengal Press got an opportunity to push forward with their scheme soon after. The communal clashes, which came in the wake of independence both in India and Pakistan (Assam was remarkably free from this turmoil), brought about an exodus of over three million East Pakistan Hindus to West Bengal, Assam, Bihar and other adjoining Indian territories; and the Bengal leaders and the Bengal Press advocated, and have still been advocating, rehabilitation of East Bengal refugees in Assam far beyond her accommodating capacity. The refugee problem is an all-India problem, and the rehabilitating burden is to be shared by all the States of India. But West Bengal has been employing all sorts of designs and pressures to thrust as many of these refugees as it can on Assam in preference to other States in pursuance of its Greater Bengal or Second Bengal scheme. The hospitable Assamese people and Assam Government have also accommodated more than half a million of these East Bengal refugees in Assam even by sacrificing the interests of her indigenous people. But instead of being grateful for what Assam has done for the Bengalis, the Bengal leaders and the Bengal Press have been vilifying the Assamese people and the Assam Government with the ulterior motive of founding a second Bengal in Assam.

This is the background of the recent and present campaign of the Bengal Press against the Assam Government and the Assamese people in the pretext of protecting the "rightful and legitimate interests" of the Bengalis in Assam in respect of its official language. The Bengal Press has instigated the Bengalis of Assam to oppose the adoption of Assamese, the language of three-fifths of the population of the State, as its only official language, and to demand the adoption of Bengali, the language of less than one-fifth of the population, also as an official language, which tantamounts to demanding to make Assam a bilingual State. These papers have distorted facts and dissipated false and provocative news and views in this connection against the Assamese.

The Hindusthan Standard of 15th July 1960 observed editorially: "Why are the victims of the Assam linguistic riots fleeing towards West Bengal? Why are the West Bengal Government and Dr. Roy personally showing so much concern at the distressing development on the other side of the border? The reason is obvious. The Bengalis in Assam consider West

Bengal as their home and look to the West Bengal Government for protection when they are subjected to indignities and violence in the Assamese-dominated State. The Government of West Bengal also consider those people to be its charge and feels distressed and dejected if it cannot do more for these helpless victims of linguistic frenzy. The demand for the integration of the Bengali-speaking areas of Assam in West Bengal is the demand to give judicial status to this de facto relationship which has been always in existence. Sooner or later, sooner rather than later, the present State of Assam, like the Bombay State of a few months ago, must be split. The Bengali-speaking areas of Assam should then come to West Bengal even though some of those are not contiguously situated. If the Union Territories can be successfully administered by the Centre from a distance, in some cases of more than a thousand miles, Cachar and some other areas will surely be administered equally well from Calcutta."

It should be noted in this connection that out of eleven and odd lakhs of people of Cachar, the only Bengali-majority district of Assam, 8 lakhs are Bengali-speaking and at least half of these people, the Muslims and the considerate element of Hindus support the adoption of Assamese as the only official language of Assam at the State level. They along with other 3 lakhs of non-Bengali-speaking people—Assamese, Manipuris, Hindusthani and the teagarden labour population of the district—are bitterly opposed to the separation of Cachar from Assam on any account, and as such this demand of a section of the Cachar people for separation of Cachar is the demand of only a fanatic element of the Bengali-speaking inhabitants there, propped up by the West Bengal leaders and Press. The people of Assam can neither tolerate this guardianship of West Bengal over the Bengali-speaking people of Assam nor concede their unreasonable demand for separation of Cachar.

The two incidents which provoked the Assamese-speaking people to demonstrate in support of the demand for the adoption of Assamese as the official language of Assam and against the Bengalis were (1) a procession organised by the Bengalis in Shillong on 21st of May 1960, which raised disparaging and provocative slogans against the Assamese language and removed or destroyed signboards in Assamese from the roads, offices and shops on its way; and (2) an armed attack on a group of Assamese students at the Mariani Railway station by an organised crowd from the Local Bengali Railway Colony. Both these incidents were admitted and deplored by the saner section of Bengalis of Shillong and Mariani in statements to the Press. The Assam papers gave publicity to those statements and appealed editorially for mutual tolerance and peace. But the Calcutta papers not

only kept supremely silent about these unfortunate incidents but also refrained from publishing the said statements of the saner section of Bengalis.

On the 23rd July 1960 the Chief Minister, Shri B.P. Chaliha, announced that the Government would introduce a bill in the Assam Assembly to declare Assamese as the official language of the State with safeguards for the hills and the Cachar district. This reasonable decision of the Assam Government was violently attacked by the Calcutta Press and the aggressive section of Bengalis of Assam. The Bengal papers began to dissipate all sorts of baseless 'news' about suppression and repression of Bengalis in Assam. For weeks together their editorial columns carried nothing but vituperations against the Assamese and the Assam Government and the advice to the Union Government to dismiss the Assam Ministry and introduce President's rule in Assam.

The Amrit Bazar Patrika of July 27, 1960, wrote editorially : "In a statement issued to the Press on June 23 the Chief Minister announced that the State Government had decided to introduce a bill in the next session of the Assam Assembly to declare Assamese as the State language of Assam. ... But Assamese is not the only language spoken in Assam. There are other languages including Bengali spoken by considerable sections of people. These latter have naturally been perturbed over this defiant move for the imposition of Assamese on them."

The Editor of *The Hindusthan Standard* wrote on June 25, 1960 : "The declaration in the Chief Minister's statement in favour of 'Assamese as the State language' is ominous indeed even with the qualification that the official bill will be 'more or less on the lines of the recommendations of the A.P.C.C.' We are quite sure that the proposed official bill would be unacceptable to the linguistic minorities in Assam even if it were modelled wholly on the lines of the State Congress proposals. The provocation would be so great that the manifestations of the natural resentment may well be a matter of concern to everybody and a threat, we apprehend, to even the size of the existing State of Assam.

"This, in our opinion, is a fit case for Central intervention—at the official as well as the Congress level."

The Hindusthan Standard of July 7, 1960, published a long and baseless report from its "Staff Reporter back from Assam", which said : "Three factors, it appears, have encouraged organised attacks on the Bengalis in Assam valley. These are : the activities of the anti-Chaliha clique within the

Congress ; financial help to anti-social elements from non-Bengali and non-Assamese businessmen in Assam ; and tendentious reports in Assamese newspapers inciting anti-Bengali feelings."

Such baseless and malicious pieces of propaganda went definitely to aggravate the situation. There was nothing like an "anti-Chaliha clique within the Congress" in Assam. Mention of a few names in this connection only antagonised them. The non-Assamese businessmen of Assam also resented this unprovoked attack on them. The Assam newspapers retorted immediately that they were prepared to face any enquiry or trial on this charge. As a matter of fact, they had, a few months later, formally requested the then President of All-India Newspaper Editors' Conference, Mr. Durga Das, during his visit to Assam, to enquire into this allegation, and placed their whole files at his disposal along with some cuttings from their Calcutta contemporaries bearing on this agitation. But he did not like to adjudicate on the matter, and contented himself by pleading for mutual tolerance and restraint.

The Amrita Bazar Patrika of July 9, 1960, published in addition to other false and provocative news, one item under the heading, "Mass Molestation of Bengali Girls in Assam" from its "Staff Reporter". Such wild and mean allegations were naturally widely resented in Assam. The same paper in its edition of July 8, 1960, carried a horribly false and provocative news that at a certain place in Barpeta four Bengali women were burnt to death.

The Hindusthan Standard of July 9, 1960, published a false and mischievous despatch from its Staff Reporter under headlines, "Army Control All Over Assam" ; "Centre Considering Proposal" ; "Deteriorating Law and Order Situation". This it did in spite of the Assam Government's contradicting similar earlier news published by *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* of June 29, 1960, under the heading, "Army Deployed to Quell Disturbances" from its Special Representative at Shillong. *The Hindusthan Standard* of July 10, 1960, reported under a 5-column headline on the first page : "10 Bengalis In Flight Done To Death" ; "Train Held Up, Passengers Dragged Down And Attacked" ; "Assam Situation Now out of Gear." In the body of the despatch also from its "Staff Reporter" it was said that the number of those killed could be 12 or even more and that this heinous and horrible crime was committed at a place near Rangiya Police Station on July 8. The Kamrup Deputy Commissioner's contradiction of this report, saying that there had never been any attack on a train by a mob in

Rangiya area on July 8 where 12 persons were killed, was not published by this paper.

The Hindusthan Standard of July 13, 1960, in its leader under the heading, "Still Inactive", remarked: "Far from taking effective steps against the law-breakers the State Government has allowed the rowdies a free hand as if the Bengali-speaking people in Assam are outlaws and as such deserved no help from authority. This official apathy at all levels is far more shocking than the violent activities of the lawless mob." *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* of July 15, 1960, published a "news" from its Special Representative at Shillong under the headlines, "Two Assam Ministers Likely To Resign"; "President's Rule Urged to Stem Present Situation," which was entirely false and baseless and malicious.

The Hindusthan Standard of July 21, 1960, published a news item under the double column headline, "Mob Attack on Bengali Staff of Natural Gas Commission At Sibsagar," which was entirely false and was contradicted by local authorities.

The Hindusthan Standard of July 27, 1960, published a report from its own correspondence at Karimganj to the effect that one Bina Dasgupta, sister of one Amalendu Dasgupta of Noakhali Colony, Gauhati, and student of the 4th Year Arts Class at Cotton College, Gauhati, was forcibly taken away by Assamese miscreants on July 5 and had since remained untraced. The Cotton College authorities immediately contradicted the report saying that there was no student by the name of Bina Dasgupta in the 4th Year B.A. Class or, for that matter, in the whole College. The daily did not publish this contradiction. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* of the same date attacked the Central Government for not dismissing the Assam Ministry in a long editorial, "Bankruptcy at the Top", remarking sarcastically inter alia: "And this ruling party must continue to rule—now and hereafter—in spite of whatever happens, for its removal from power would affect the prestige of the all-India ruling party of which it is a branch. Prestige is a mighty word indeed. To our former British rulers we are deeply indebted for our pathetic concern for prestige which, we believe, is the pillar of Governmental authority."

On August 13, 1961, all the Bengali-owned papers of Calcutta published with great ado and with banner headlines the report of demonstrations by a Bengali mob against Shri Asoke Sen, the Central Law Minister, on his arrival at New Delhi on August 12 after a three day visit to Assam. Shri Sen's fault was that according to him the position in Assam was not as bad as it was held to be outside, and there was no case for President's

rule in this State, and that he appealed to both the Bengali and Assamese communities of Assam to forgive and forget the past and live in peace. The same day and the day after these papers castigated the Prime Minister just because he had the fairness and courage to declare after his personal survey and enquiry that the situation in Assam was under full control, that rehabilitation was going on in full swing now, and that Calcutta papers were exaggerating and misrepresenting the whole matter, and because he also ruled out President's rule proposed by these papers.

These are only a few samples to illustrate the role played by the Calcutta papers during the 1960 disturbances. We, moreover, have referred above only to two representative English dailies for the convenience of verification by non-Bengali readers. The Bengali language dailies of the City exceeded their English counterpart in instigating the Bengali-speaking people of Assam against the Assam government and the Assamese. I give an example of what the Bengali Press did, which would not require a knowledge of that language. *The Ananda Bazar Patrika* of July 28, 1960, published a grossly false report of Assam's so-called atrocities and killings of Bengalis under a front page banner headline, "Hundreds Killed in Assam's Hellish Carnage" and placed on the same page a photographic representation of an agonising woman as being the picture of an oppressed female crying helplessly for the punishment of sinners and the redress of the wrong committed on her. Her right arm had been partly left out in the picture. On an inner page (page 8) the same picture was reproduced as representing a Bengali woman refugee from Assam being administered anti-cholera injection by a West Bengal Public Health doctor on her arrival at Alipurduar. Curiously enough, the portion of the hand missing in the front page picture appears in this reproduction, and the doctor is shown applying his needle to that very part. This reminds one of Lord Macaulay's classic description of the general character of the Bengalis: "What is horn to the buffalo..."

The Assam Official Language Bill 1960, with more than ample provisions for the linguistic minorities in Cachar and the Hill Districts, was passed by the Assam Legislative Assembly in October 1960. This eminently reasonable enactment brought satisfaction and peace to the overwhelming majority of the population of the State. The recalcitrant Bengali-speaking element of Cachar was, however, supported by the powerful Calcutta Press and leaders in their fresh move against this legislation, which had in the meantime become an Act being assented to by both the Governor of the State as well as the President of India. The language disturbances of May and June last are

entirely the creation of this unreasonable and extreme Bengali element of Cachar under the sanction of Calcutta journalism.

Support and guidance to Cachar's War Council

The Cachar Sangram Parishad was formed with the avowed object of obtaining for Bengal the status of an associate State language for the whole of Assam or, failing that, separating Cachar from Assam either to form a separate administrative unit with Tripura or to be amalgamated with West Bengal. The leaders of the Parishad toured extensively in the district, organised meetings, made violent and provocative speeches against the Assam Government and the Assamese people, enlisted volunteers for the impending fight against the Government and collected funds. The Calcutta newspapers lent their fullest support to, and were full of applause for, this militant organisation and the Cachar Congressmen's Bhasa Andolan Samiti constituted with the same objective.

The Sangram Parishad launched its direct action against the Government on May 19, 1961, which necessitated the authorities to take recourse to firing on a violent mob at Silchar on the same day, resulting in the death of eight and injuries to several. The Sangram Parishad and Bhasa Andolan Committee leaders became wild and roused mob frenzy to the utmost. The Bengal Press came out once again with full-throated denunciation of the Assam Government and whole-hearted support to these organisations. Day in, and day out, they covered practically nothing except the agitational activities in Cachar.

The Hindusthan Standard of May 25, 1961, carried extensive news and despatches under such headlines as "Complete and Peaceful Hartal Paralyzes City Life". "Cachar D.C.C.'s Take Historic Decision : M.L.A.'s and M.P.'s To Resign All Together", "Firing on Peaceful People Condemned"—all under the banner headline, "Protest Against Unashamed Barbarities." The leader in the same issue, "No Halfway House", averred that the Bengali-speaking people in Assam are determined to fight for the recognition of their mother tongue as an official language for the whole of Assam, and that nothing less than that will satisfy them. *The Amrita Bazar Patrika* of the same date flashed reports with big headlines, "Calcutta Salutes Silchar Martyrs" "Congress Legislators From Cachar Resign : Movement Spreads to Villages," "Statement of Divisional Commissioner Full of Untruth", and carried two editorials in support of the Sangram Parishad. The *Jugantar* of May 26 presented numerous exciting and false news about the situation in Cachar under the banner headline, "Those who Are Fighting with the Monsters in Cachar", and attacked the Assam Government and supported

the Sangram Parishad fully in its editorial. The *Hindusthan Standard* of the same date brought out all exaggerated news with a note of approbation under a three-column headline, "Mass Defiance of Ban At Silchar," "Picketing All Over Cachar," "Resignations More and More," etc. In its editorial, "Of What Avail", it belittled Assam Government's decision to hold a high level judicial enquiry into the Silchar firing as useless, and eulogised the action of the agitators.

The editorials of almost all the leading Calcutta papers of May 27, enjoined upon the all-India Congress leaders assembled at Durgapur to take drastic and strong steps against the Assam Government. It may also be remembered that a Deputy Minister of the Central Government and the Congress President, Shri Reddy, were insulted, and an attempt was made even to kill the latter at Durgapur. The Prime Minister, Shri Nehru, in his speech in the meeting of the A.I.G.C. observed that this state of affairs was the result of the totally unwarranted and provocative writings of the Calcutta papers and that he himself would have been excited like these youngmen by reading those papers had he been ignorant of the real situation in Assam.

The Amrita Bazar Patrika of May 28, 1961, published a false and tendentious news on its front page under a three-column head-line, "Sympathy for Cachar : Hill people to Start Movement." *The Ananda Bazar Patrika* of May 19 published with much enthusiasm under a banner headline, "Attack on Centre's Futile Assam Policy", the criticism of Prime Minister Nehru by some West Bengal members on the A.I.C.C. in that that Committee's meeting at Durgapur, and in another news-item from its Staff Reporter from Silchar reported that the situation in Cachar would go out of control if Bengali was not recognised as an additional official language throughout Assam.

Thereafter the Calcutta Press began attacking the all-India leaders of the Congress for several days as they did not fulfil the aspirations of the Bengalis at Durgapur. Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, the Central Home Minister, came to Shillong almost immediately after the Durgapur meeting to find out if any reasonable amendment of the Assam Official Language Act 1960 for the satisfaction of the Cachar Bengalis was possible. But the Sangram Parishad leaders refused to talk with him unless their demand for recognition of Bengali as a second official language was accepted in principle. This Shri Shastri, like his predecessor Pandit Pant in 1960, found impossible to concede. He, however, recommended that the Assam Official Language Act 1960 be amended to delete the provision relating to Mahkuma Parishads and to provide that communications between State Headquarters and Cachar continue in English until replaced by

Hindi. This proposal dissatisfied the Assamese-speaking and other non-Bengali-speaking people and even a large number of Bengali-speaking people of Cachar.

The West Bengal Press has now adopted the new device of bolstering up the Sangram Parishad and undermining the activities of the Shanti Parishad which stands for support to Assamese in Cachar. The Shanti Parishad has been dubbed as an organisation dominated by communalist Muslims, mostly of Pakistani persuasion, whose opinion should not count. The authorities have rightly not given any credence to this vilification. The Sangram Parishad and Cachar Congress Bhasha Andolon Samiti have also resiled from their previous stand. They have now disowned their previous demand for separation of Cachar from Assam and have agreed to suspend their agitation experimentally. But we cannot afford to be complacent about it. In this connection the editorial comment on *The Hindustan Times* of July 4 last may be borne in mind. : "A most striking example of how democracy is being turned topsy-turvy is provided by the conduct of the representatives of the Bengali-majority district of Cachar in Assam State. They demand for Bengali the same position as Assamese and have been openly declaring their lack of confidence in the State Government. The Union Home Minister in the latest series of talks with their representatives has gone to the uttermost limit to assure their language the fullest protection and the widest use. In response all that they have offered is suspension of their campaign for a while to see how what has come to be known as the Shastri Formula is implemented. The majority cannot be suppressed at the instance of an aggressive and uncompromising minority. The Bengalees in Assam are not the only linguistic minority in the country which is called upon to accept the language of the region they live in. It is time that Cachar delegates realized that they cannot have everything their own way and that there are limits to the patience and forbearance of even the most devoted democrats. They should make up their minds to accept the liberal arrangements offered to them and try to win the Assamese people's goodwill to ensure peace and prosperity for themselves."

How we wish the West Bengal Press had emulated this example of journalism.

APPENDIX A

FROM "NOTES ON THE SYLHETEE DIALECT" BY BENUDHAR RAJKHOWA, Maulavibazar (Sylhet), 1913

The following extracts on the language and culture of the people of the contiguous areas of Sylhet (5 thanas of which have been transferred during the partition of India to the present-day Cachar), Cachar and Jaintia would certainly be found helpful in understanding the language tangle in Cachar. The learned author prefaced his discourse with the words : "My object in writing these notes on the Sylhetee dialect is to show that the ancient literature of Sylhet is Assamese ; that the Sylhetee dialect has sprung from the Assamese language and that the people of Sylhet are really Assamese..... that the Assamese and the Sylhetees were at one time the same people, speaking the same language and inhabiting the same kingdom, the kingdom of Kamarupa." What he says of Sylhet is applicable *mutatis mutandis* to Cachar as constituted to-day. We need not perhaps reproduce here the numerous lexical and syntactical correspondences, cited by Rajkhowa, between the language of Cachar, etc., and the Assamese.

*

"There is ample evidence to show that the people of Sylhet at one time spoke the Assamese language. There are Assamese words still in common use among the village folk of Sylhet ; and the Bengali language which usurped the place of Assamese has not been successful in banishing the latter altogether from the land, although it has been unremittingly exercising its influence since 1874, when Assam was constituted into a Chief Commissionership and Sylhet amalgamated with it. The Sylhetees during this period began to study the Bengali language and Bengali became the medium through which education was given to the children at the schools. They had acquired by this time a good deal of knowledge of the subtle methods of self-aggrandisement, known to the people of Bengal."

*

Achyutcharan Chaudhuri in his *Srihatter Itivritta* refers to an 'Asam Rai', who held sway over the eastern parts of the Surma Valley. "This Asam Rai might be an Ahom and not a Tippera, as his name indicates.

"There is no authentic history of ancient Sylhet ; but the linguistic affinity of the Sylhetee with the Assamese is the best

history which affords us useful information in discovering the past of Sylhet..... Unlike Bengal most of the Brahmins in Sylhet are Sarmas and most of the Sudras Dasses. We do not meet Mukherjees, Bannerjees, Chatterjees and Gangulees here in Sylhet."

*

"The Sylhet District Gazetteer writes (chapter II, pages 30-31) : 'Rudra Singh formally notified the Muhammedan Fauzdar of Sylhet that Jaintia had passed into his possession, and the two Governments prepared to exchange lists of the products of their respective countries, with the object of facilitating trade.' I give below two letters, one written by the Fauzdar of Sylhet to the Bar Phukan at Gauhati and the other the reply of the Bar Phukan to it, which will show that Sylhet was formerly in closest touch with Assam..... The Fauzdar's letter is important in another respect. The style of that letter is more akin to Assamese than to Bengali."

*

"The Jaintia pargana is included in the district of Sylhet..... Babu Achyut Charan Chaudhury says that the books of the Jaintia people contained a large number of vulgar words and so were not easy for many to understand..... The author of Srihatter Itibritta is forced thus to talk loosely, because he does not like to admit that it was the Assamese language which prevailed in Jaintia....."

"Some of the officers in Jaintia used to be called Dalais and Bardalais. Will any one seriously dispute that these titles are not Assamese ?"

*

"The district of Cachar adjoins to the district of Sylhet to the east. It has been said that Cachar was under the sway of the Ahom kings. The Ahoms also subjugated Jaintia..... The language of Sylhet which was the language of the old Aryan settlers from Kamarupa must have been helped forward by the language of the Assamese during the Ahom rule."

*

"The Kacharis are believed to be very closely allied to the Koches of Assam. They are identical with the Meches of Goalpara. The Kacharis of Cachar came from Assam."

*

"In the Kamakhya-Tantra mention is made of seven hills, which were included in the kingdom of Kamarupa. Here is the sloka :

"tripura kaukika caiva jayanti manicandrika
kachadi magadhi devi asyami sapta parvatah.

"*Kaukika* is Kuki Hills (the Lushai Hills). *Mani* is Manipur. *Chandrika* is Chandragiri in Cachar. *Magadha* was a certain hill in Sylhet, not yet identified.

"The Sylhet District Gazetteer writes (pages 73-74, chap. III) ; 'According to Dr. Grierson, the language spoken by the inhabitants of Eastern Sylhet is not intelligible to the natives of Central or Northern Bengal (*Linguistic Survey of India*, vol. V, part I, page 224). There are several peculiarities of pronunciation. *K* has a guttural sound like the German *ch* ; *ch* is pronounced like *s* ; and there is no difference between *ch* and *chh*. The sibilant, as in the case of the Assamese, is often replaced by *h* ; and the Sylhetee speaks of *haph* when referring to a snake, and talks of *hakal* instead of *sakal*..... The Devanagari character is used amongst low caste Muhammedans especially in the east of the district. They find it easier to master than Bengali and Bengali books are printed in this character for their benefit."

*

"The Assamese certainly have no grievance, so far as their interests are concerned, because the Sylhetees have adopted the Bengali language. But the Assamese ought to have cause for complaint if the Sylhetees should look upon them as an alien and hostile race."

APPENDIX B

THE FIRST RESOLUTION OF ASAM SAHITYA SABHA ON ASSAM'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGE, MARCH 11-12, 1950

This twenty-first annual session of Asam Sahitya Sabha, held at Margherita, strongly places its demand before the Government of Assam that the Assamese language be declared as the State (official) language of Assam and as the medium of instruction in all the high schools of Assam, with the exception of the high schools in Khasi and Jaintia, Lushai and Garo Hills Districts, in the session of the Assam Legislative Assembly to commence from the 13th March next.

[The 16th of July 1951 was for the first time observed as the "State Language Day" throughout the State. The Government of Assam came out promptly with a press-note, stating what measures were being taken by them for introducing Assamese into official business. Shri Dharanidhar Basumatari, M.L.A., gave notice of a resolution to be moved in the Assembly; but this resolution was eventually dropped. The 22nd session of the Sabha held at Shillong on November 8-9, 1951 and the 23rd session held at Jorhat on December 31, 1954 and January 1, 1955, discussed the issue, but did not make any new resolutions. The 24th session, held at Gauhati on December 26-27, 1956, regretted the Government's inaction and reiterated the Sabha's original demand; it also condemned the move in certain circles in West Bengal to make Assam a bilingual State. The 27th session of Asam Sahitya Sabha held at Nowgong on April 18-20, 1959, expressed anxiety that the Government did not act in the matter in spite of repeated public demand on behalf of Assamese, and indicated 1960 as the deteline within which the Government were requested to take measures to recognise Assamese as the official language of the State.]

APPENDIX C

RESOLUTION OF THE TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF ASAM SAHITYA SABHA, OCTOBER 29, 1960

Whereas, although the Assamese language alone has apparently been declared the official language of the State in the Assam Official Language Bill, passed by the Assam Legislative Assembly on the 24th October 1960, yet in the said Bill

(a) provision has been made for the use of the Assamese and English languages and thereafter of the Assamese and Hindi languages in the Secretariat and the offices of the Heads of the Departments of the State Government ;

(b) provision has been made for the adoption of Assamese (or any other language) by the Autonomous Region or the Autonomous Districts only if a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting decide in favour of such adoption for the purpose of the Autonomous Region or the Autonomous Districts, as the case may be ; and

(c) inspite of the solid demand for the declaration of Assamese alone as the State's official language made by the indigenous Assamese, Manipuri, teagarden labourer and Nepali people and a considerable proportion of the Muslims of Cachar, provision has been made for the adoption of Assamese for administrative and other official purposes up to and including the district level in Cachar only if the Mahkuma Parishads and Municipal Boards of the district in a joint meeting by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members present and voting decide in favour of such adoption,

Asam Sahitya Sabha is of the express opinion that the long standing demand of this Sabha for the declaration of Assamese as the official language throughout Assam has not been adequately met by the Government through the provisions made in the Bill.

Asam Sahitya Sabha, therefore, resolves to request the Government to make provision for the adoption of Assamese and English, and, thereafter of Assamese alone when the use of English is not permissible, for the official purposes at all levels including the Secretariat and the offices of the Heads of the Departments and in all the districts of Assam.

APPENDIX D

ASAM SAHITYA SABHA'S MEMORANDUM
TO THE UNION HOME MINISTER,
JUNE 4, 1961

ASAM SAHITYA SABHA

Gauhati, Assam
June 4, 1961

Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri,
Home Minister, Government of India
Camp Gauhati

Subject : The Assam Official Language Act 1960

Dear Sir,

On behalf of Asam Sahitya Sabha, the oldest literary and cultural organisation of the people of Assam, we beg to lay the following few lines on the above subject before you.

1. During your few days' stay in Assam you have been, we are sure, fully acquainted with the language issue in the State. You have also possibly realised how the action of the Sangram Parishad of Cachar has disturbed peace in that State in general and how, in particular, normal life in that district has been shaken to the very bones by the same action.

2. We believe that the Assam Official Language Act 1960 has been so drafted as to make very ample provisions of reasonable safeguards for the linguistic minorities including the Bengali speaking people of Cachar. In our considered opinion no question of amendment of any of the clauses of the Act does arise at all. As a matter of fact, the Assam Official Language Act 1960 has not fully met the demands of the Assamese people ; but having regard to the special problems of Assam, the Assamese people have accepted the Act as a sort of compromise.

3. We submit that if the Bengali speaking people of Cachar have any reasonable grievance against the Assam Official Language Act 1960, they are surely at liberty to seek redress under Article 347 of the Constitution of India by petitioning to the President or, in the alternative, to voice their opinion for amendment of the Act on the floor of the Assam Legislative Assembly. We strongly feel that the Cachar people have ignored all democratic and constitutional ways and have, on the contrary, started a so-called satyagraha under the name of a militant organisation styled as Sangram Parishad, to which even the Congressmen of the district also have unfortunately succumbed.

4. It can in no way be admitted that this Sangram Parishad represents fully the public opinion in Cachar, for there are some twenty purely Assamese villages in the district, and the indigenous Muslims, Manipuris, Kacharis, teagarden labourers and others do not at all support the demand for Bengali as an official language ; nor do these people dream of a Purvachal.

5. It is our considered view, Sir, that the decision of the Nikhil Asam Bangabhasa-bhasi Samiti to observe an All Assam Demands Day is intended to bring about tension and unrest throughout the State. Although on your specific request the sponsors of the Demands Day have deferred its observance, it is feared that the threat itself will react badly on other linguistic groups such as those speaking Assamese, Hindi and Manipuri.

6. We need hardly refer to the very provocative writings of the Calcutta papers and the constant incitements provided by unrestrained utterances of the West Bengal leaders since this dismal fact is only too well-known to you. We have reasons to believe that if this attitude of the Calcutta papers and Bengali leaders against the Government of Assam and the Assamese people does not change, its repercussion on the peace-loving Assamese people may prove very disquieting indeed.

In the circumstance as above, Sir, we beg to submit that the Assam Official Language Act 1960, which was lawfully enacted and properly assented to by the Governor of Assam and the President of India should be allowed to function according to its provisions, as the postponement of the solution of this very important question for one more year as suggested by our revered Prime Minister will, in our opinion, worsen the situation instead of improving it ;

and that for the sake of peace and justice the Calcutta papers and the West Bengal leaders should be persuaded to refrain from their present campaign of vilification of the Government of Assam and the Assamese people.

Yours faithfully,

Raghunath Chowdhary
Nalinibala Devi
Atulchandra Hazarika
Harendranath Barua
Satischandra Kakati
Biswanarayan Shastri
Maheswar Neog

APPENDIX E

RESOLUTIONS OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE,
ASAM SAHITYA SABHA, JUNE 24-25, 1961

The Assam Official Language Act 1960, Clause 5

4. In spite of the fact that the Assam Official Language Bill 1960, passed by the Assam Legislative Assembly and since made into an Act, contained certain provisions which were detrimental to the Assamese people, Asam Sahitya Sabha had to accept the same in consideration of the special circumstances prevailing at the time ; but the movement launched under the leadership of the Cachar Congress Bhasa Andolan Committee and the Cachar Zilla Gana-Sangram Parishad to have Bengali recognised as the second official language of the State, roused oppositions in the villages as well as the outskirts of the towns of Cachar ; and this fact clearly proved the unreasonableness of the demands of the Committee and the Parishad. Against this background it has been proved by the fullest support to the Assam Official Language Act, expressed by a large majority of people consisting of the indigenous inhabitants of Cachar, the Manipuris, Hindusthanis and various tribes and teagarden labourers through meetings, processions and delegations, that the formula, put forth by Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri, Union Home Minister, and supported by the Assam Government and the A.P.C.C. Executive, is entirely undemocratic and partial. The hasty decision to accept the undue demand of a handful minority in Cachar in the name of the Shastri formula in utter neglect of the strong public opinion in the district is fraught with the possibility of making the problem more complicated than ever. Any attempt in the present circumstances to amend the Assam Official Language Act according to the Shastri formula would be nothing but an unjust denial of the rightful demand of the people of Cachar. As such this formula cannot be acceptable from any point of view.

This meeting of the Executive Committee of Asam Sahitya Sabha, therefore, urges upon the Government to take all necessary steps for the implementation of the Official Language Act, and demands that in the extreme event of unavoidable necessity to amend the clause containing the Mahkuma Parishad provision, any decision regarding the language at the district level in Cachar should be arrived at only after a referendum as suggested from different quarters, in all circumstances maintaining the status of the official language (Assamese) equally in all the districts of the State.

The Police Firing on Supporters of the Official Language

5. This meeting of the Executive Committee of Asam Sahitya Sabha, after fully considering events that have taken place during the last eighteen months in Cachar round the official language, expresses concern over the police firing at Silchar and Hailakandi on the 19th of May and the 19th of June last. The Committee is convinced that the undue demand of the Cachar Zilla Gana-Sangram Parishad to make Bengali the second official language of the State is at the root of this crisis. The Committee also clearly perceives that the disturbance and unrest prevailing in Cachar is due to the resistance of the highly unjust demand of a handful of Bengali speaking population which was encountered by the loyalty and support given to the Assamese language. The police firing of the 19th May involving the death of eleven persons, which came as a result of the preparations of the Sangram Parishad 'on a semi-military line', is an unfortunate event. The same reactionary elements of the population on the other hand exasperated with conflict and killing the large unarmed crowd, that had come in the hope to meet two Assam Ministers and to express before them their support to the original Assam Official Language Act 1960, and pushed them forward to face the police bullet on the 19th June at Hailakandi.

This meeting condemns the action of the police in opening fire on the supporters of the official language, Assamese, and condoles the death of those killed as a result of the firing. The Committee, moreover, feels that it is a curious inconsistency on the part of the Government not to declare the formation of an enquiry commission on the police action in opening fire on the supporters of the Government at Hailakandi on the 19th June after having announced an enquiry into the 19th May firing at Silchar and condoling the consequent deaths, and demands that an immediate judicial enquiry be made into the Hailakandi firing and that compensation be paid to the sufferers.

The Dark Role of the Calcutta Press

6. In the last twelve to eighteen months a constant unrest has been created in the political and social life in Assam leading to extreme and undesirable incidents like police firing mainly as a result of the malicious propaganda and incitements indulged in by the Calcutta newspapers. Asam Sahitya Sabha has been making fruitless attempts of urging upon the Government of Assam the need for arrangement for the banning of the entry of these papers into Assam. Life in Assam has been endangered by such malicious propaganda and incitement at the connivance of the Government. Such propaganda, moreover, is disturbing India's unity and solidarity.

In the circumstances this meeting once more urges upon the Government of Assam and also urges upon the Government of India, Ministry of Home, to adopt strong measures in this regard.

Maintenance of Peace

7. Life of the common people in Cachar has been rendered miserable, and the pursuit of education on the part of the school and college students especially has become impossible there due to the disturbances created by the Sangram Parishad and due to an attempt on the latter's part to effect boycott of the people supporting Assamese and, for that matter, the Assam Official Language Act in the matters of trade and commerce. The same reactionary elements have created difficulties in the matter of transport and communication.

In the circumstances this meeting of the Executive Committee earnestly requests the Government of Assam to make special arrangements for the maintenance of peace in Cachar and for special facilities for students to attend their schools and colleges.

The Menace of Polyglot States

8. The problem of official language is an internal affair for Assam, and the question of safeguarding the linguistic minorities in the State is also Assam's special responsibility. Even though any Indian citizen has the liberty to put forward any suggestion in these matters, yet the manner in which the party leadership in West Bengal is offering interference in these matters and, thereby, creating difference and disunity amongst the common people of Assam is proving detrimental to the unity and solidarity of Assam and, for that matter, of India as a whole.

The new formula proposing the creation multilingual States, put forth by Dr. B.C. Roy, Chief Minister of Bengal, in the context of the language problem of Cachar, will stand on the way of Indian unity. It is apprehended that this formula is calculated to contain the underlying possibility of having Bengali accepted as an additional official language in different States and as an additional National Language (Rashtrabhasha) of India. If this formula be taken up for implementation, complications will arise in every State in the matter of language leading to complete nullification of the principle of linguistic States.

Fully realising the inner implications of Dr. Roy's proposition, this meeting of the Executive Committee of Asam Sahitya Sabha requests the Government of India not to make any attempt to tackle the linguistic issue on the basis of that formula, and also requests the Government of Assam not to extend any cooperation to any party in that behalf.

APPENDIX F

ASAM SAHITYA SABHA'S MEMORANDUM TO THE UNION HOME MINISTER,

JUNE 29, 1961

ASSAM SAHITYA SABHA

General Secretary's Office
Vaijayanti, Saraniya
Gauhati, Assam
July 29, 1961

Shri Lal Bahadur Shastri,
Home Minister,
Government of India
New Delhi

Subject : The Assam Official Language Act 1960

Dear Sir,

In continuation of our memorandum submitted to you at Gauhati on June 4, 1961, we on behalf of Asam Sahitya Sabha beg to make the following submission for your kind consideration.

1. With the passage of the Assam Official Language Act 1960 it was earnestly hoped by the people of Assam that the language question was set at rest, and that efforts could now be directed towards the restoration of harmony among different section of the State's people. May it please be noted also that although this piece of legislation did not adequately meet the desire of the Assamese people and those others who unreservedly supported the cause of the Assamese language being the only official language of the State, Asam Sahitya Sabha and the people of Assam accepted the Act in consideration of the special circumstances then prevailing and in the hope that the safeguards given in the Act to the linguistic minorities—even to the extent of more than what should have been reasonably done—would go to bring back peace to this usually peaceful State.

2. It is very unfortunate that a section of the Bengali population of Cachar, mostly East Bengal refugees and refugee leaders drawn from among the urban people, who have always been very vociferous in their unjust demand for Bengali being made a second official language of the State of Assam, launched a militant organisation like the Cachar Zilla Gana-Sangram Parishad. To make the situation more awkward, the Congressmen including legislators and members of the Assam Provincial Congress Committee of the district, played the rebel role by joining this unwarranted movement in spite of warnings from the Congress President, and formed Bhasa Andolan Samitis. A very unnatural situation was thus created, and this culminated miserably in the death of nineteen persons as results of police firings on May 19 and June 19, 1961.

3. During this critical situation you were kind to come to Assam and explore possibilities of solving the tangle. But the solutions proposed by you in your declaration of June 6, 1961, of amending Clause 5 of the Assam Official Language Act 1960 to do away with the provision relating to Mahkuma Parishads, etc., seemed to have come only under duress of circumstances, and the decision of the Government of Assam and the Executive Committee of Assam Provincial Congress Committee seemed to be very hasty, perhaps prompted by a sincere desire to give some fulfilment to the wishes of the agitators of Cachar.

4. But the profession of these agitators to be able to speak out the whole heart of Cachar was very seriously falsified by the events in that district very immediately following their movement. Their agitation roused indignation and sharp opposition in the whole of rural Cachar as well as in the outskirts of the few small towns in the district. The unreasonableness of the demand of the Sangram Parishad was clearly proved by the spontaneous rising among the indigenous people, the Kacharis, the Hmars, the Manipuris, the Hindusthanis, and nearly the whole Muslim population of Cachar. The discomfitures of the Parishad started by May 28, when you were still engaged in the negotiations. The menacing hostility offered by the Sangram Parishad could not suppress the people, who came out with open support to the official language, Assamese, in meetings, processions and delegations. We can in no way think that the strong public opinion thus expressed for having Assamese only as the official language of Assam is to be treated with neglect or connivance if we mean to respect democreeacy.

5. We, therefore, feel it to be our duty to make the submission that the decision to amend the Language Act in the light of your suggestions will be unwarranted from facts and principles of democracy, and will neither be conducive to the "stabilization of the situation regarding the language issue in Assam" nor in any way "facilitate final peaceful settlement fair to all", which must be the sincerest desire of us all now. This decision, taken under duress and based upon the illegitimate demand of an extremely limited section of Cachar's people, cannot naturally have the effects of permanent good.

6. The Assamese people strongly resent that their legitimate demand for the recognition of Assamese as the only official language of the State, which has been only partially fulfilled in the Assam Official Language Act 1960 as it stands, will be further adversely affected if the Act is amended so as to do away with the provision regarding Mahkuma Parishads. It need perhaps scarcely be pointed out that with all the safeguards for the minority languages as already embodied in the Act and the amendment to it now proposed, the Assamese language will be

reduced to the status of a regional official language within the State. This apparently would be in contravention of constitutional propriety, as has been vouchsafed by the Prime Minister of India's letter to the West Bengal Provincial Congress Vice-President :

"But it is clear to me, in giving full recognition to the regional language such as Nepalese, the State language does not cease to function. The State language is anyhow the language for the whole State. In giving a minority language full protection, we should not do something which may adversely affect some other group in that area."

We take our stand firmly on this constitutional right of the official language when we demand that Assam's official language, Assamese, cannot or should not be shut off from Cachar or, for that matter, any other part of the State. We pray that the Government may not do positive harm to the acknowledged official language only in deference to a precipitate demand of unreasonableness.

7. We have already, in our memorandum submitted to you on June 4 last, attracted your attention to the provocative writings of the Calcutta papers and the constant incitements provided by irresponsible utterances of the West Bengal politicians. No peaceful attitude is to be expected from the Bengalis of Assam until and unless there be a quiet on this agitational front. Without this provocation from outside, Assam can, we are sure, always be expected to be peaceful. We, therefore, earnestly hope that you would kindly use your kind influence so that the extraneous agencies of vilification and provocation do not disturb Assam's calm.

8. The latest resolutions of the Executive Committee of Asam Sahitya Sabha on the language issue vis-a-vis the Cachar trouble reflect, we believe, the public opinion in Assam, and the Sabha has the apprehension that any attempt at this stage to alter the provisions of the Assam Official Language Act 1960, despite all unsatisfactory features in them, will seriously disturb Assam's atmosphere now somewhat stabilized as you rightly judge.

In the circumstance, Sir, we beg to request you to reassess the whole situation, and advise the Government of Assam to take very early steps for the implementation of the Assam Official Language Act 1960 as it now stands.

Yours faithfully,
Maheswar Neog
 General Secretary,
 Asam Sahitya Sabha

ABOUT THE WRITERS

Principal **Trailokyanath Goswami**, Nalbari College, a short-story writer and critic of the first rank, is the President of Asam Sahitya Sabha. He is the author of *Aruna*, *Sahitya-alochana*, etc.

Dr **V. Venkata Rao**, Reader and Head of the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University, is a prolific writer on political subjects ; is the author of *Parliamentary Democracy in Asia*, *Prime Minister*, *Municipal Administration*, *Pan-Arabism*, *Ancient Political Thought*, *Hundred Years of Local Self-government* ; is associated with Indian Political Science Association, Local Self-Government Institute, Indian Institute of Public Administration, etc.

Shri **Raghunath Chowdhary**, one of the major poets in modern Assamese, was the President of Asam Sahitya Sabha, 1936-37 ; is the Chairman of the Asam Rajyabhasa Karma-Parishad since 1960 ; is the author of several collections of fine lyrics and prose-poems. Aged 83 now, he pours forth his righteous indignation at the long history of provincial linguistic aggression here.

Shri **D. Pathak**, Barrister-at-Law, is an Advocate, Assam High Court, and Lecturer, Gauhati University Law College.

Shri **Satis Chandra Kakati**, a leading journalist, is the Editor, *Asam Bani* (weekly), and Assistant Editor, *The Assam Tribune*, (daily) the author of *Discovery of Assam* and other works in Assamese.

Dr **Maheswar Neog**, Reader, Gauhati University, literary and art critic, is the General Secretary, Asam Sahitya Sabha ; is the author of *Sankaradeva* and *Sanchayana* (anthology of Assamese poetry from the beginning, Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi), *Painting in Assam*, other works and scientific edition of medieval Assamese and Sanskrit texts ; is associated with cultural and research institutes and journals of India.

Shri **Harendranath Barua**, one of the foremost journalists of the State, is the Editor, *The Natun Asamiya* (Assamese daily) ; is the author of several small publications on linguistic and political problems of Assam.

